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April 5, 1893.

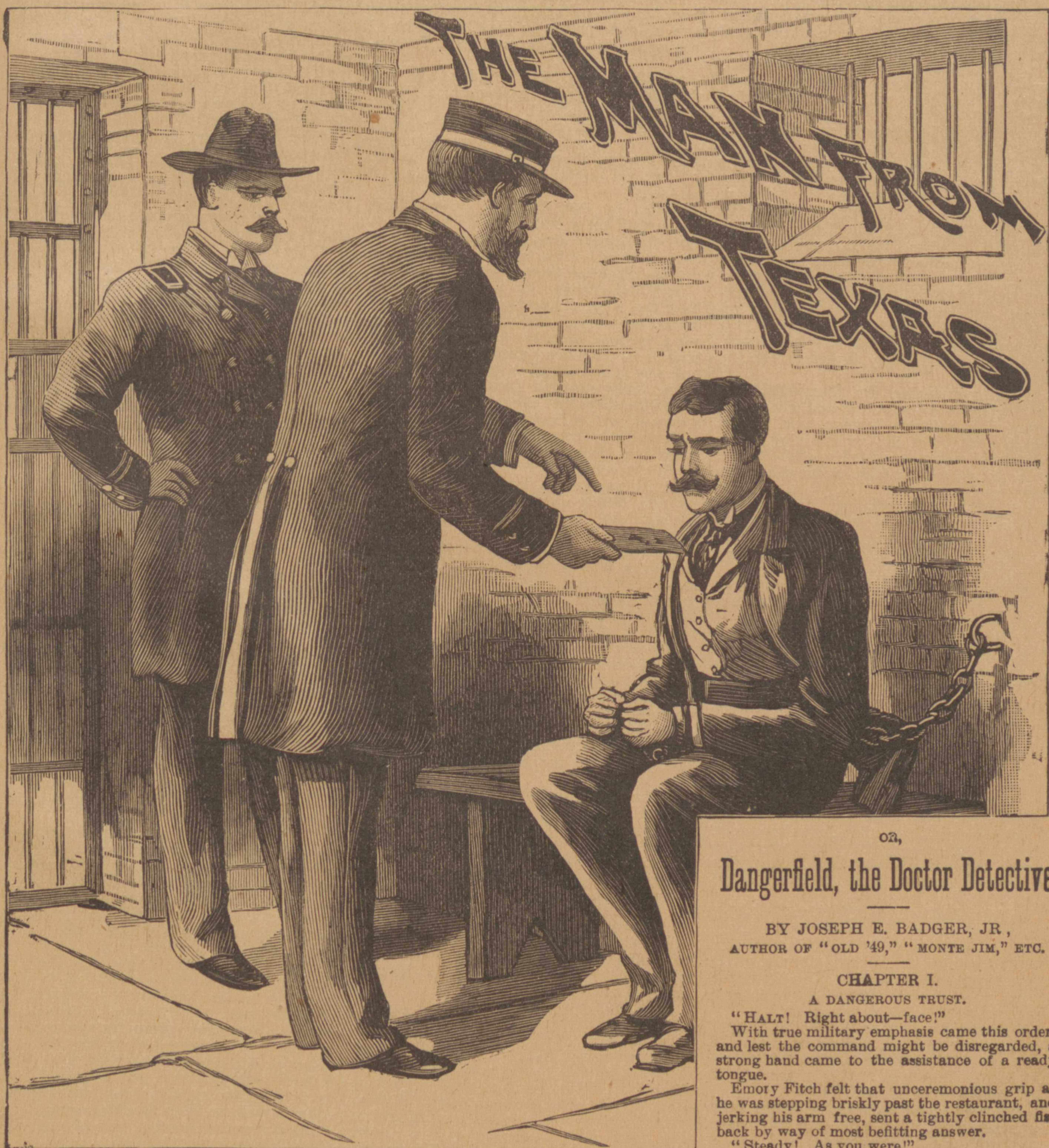
No. 754.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
93 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

Vol. LVIII.



OR,

Dangerfield, the Doctor Detective.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.,
AUTHOR OF "OLD '49," "MONTE JIM," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DANGEROUS TRUST.

"HALT! Right about—face!"

With true military emphasis came this order, and lest the command might be disregarded, a strong hand came to the assistance of a ready tongue.

Emory Fitch felt that unceremonious grip as he was stepping briskly past the restaurant, and jerking his arm free, sent a tightly clinched fist back by way of most befitting answer.

"Steady! As you were!"

A smile accompanied the words, the face that bore it drawing back and to one side, while a

CHIEF GOWDY PRODUCED THAT MARKED BANK-NOTE AND POINTED OUT THE TRIANGULAR SLIT MADE BY THE DAGGER.

broad palm struck his own in a one-sided shake.

Not until that instant did the young fellow fairly see the one who had so unceremoniously checked his progress, but as that firm, warm grip held his hand, he saw this was no case of wanton insult as he had at first imagined, but something about this strong, comely face with its brown beard of military cut, strongly reminded him of his soldier-father, now stationed near the Texas border.

"Palm, not fist, my dear boy. Time was when the Little Corporal—"

"Doctor Danger!" fairly exploded young Fitch, his frown vanishing before an eager light, his grip tightening with sudden ardor. "It surely is—isn't it?"

"Just as surely Doctor Danger as that you are the Little Corporal, who used to cry because I declined to lend him my spurs in order to make his leg-charger prance more realistically!" returned the elder, giving one shapely leg a trotting motion as though to help recall the past. "And now the ready fist—eh?"

Emory Fitch blushed a bit, and laughed shortly.

"You're here to stay?"

"On furlough for a short time, yes."

"Then you're coming home with me, of course. The mother will be on nettles until she hears—all well out yonder, sir?"

"I left Captain Fitch in the best of health, and have a message for his wife, your mother. But, that will keep until after breakfast."

"Which you'll take with us. Come, sir, and I'll—"

"Later on, not now," declined Doctor Danger as the young man would have drawn him away from the doorway. "Although I've come here to St. Louis on purpose to see Mrs. Fitch, there's something I wish to take with me when I pay my respects."

"To see mother? Then her explanation reached father before you started, doctor?"

"Not if it related to your change of residence. But, come in. I haven't broken fast this morning, although the latitude of the sun makes me ashamed to admit as much. Still—come in and sit by, if you can't do any better, lad."

Cheerily speaking, Dr. Dangerfield led the way into the restaurant, and giving his order with military decision, took a more leisurely survey of the good-looking young fellow who was now seated opposite to him at the little *tete-a-tete* table at one side of the apartment.

An active, brisk-moving, quick-spoken man of twenty-two years, with big blue eyes, and light, curling blonde hair. Add to this, the shapely figure of a latter-day athlete, and you see Emory Fitch.

His opposite was even better worth looking at, just then, unless the observer happened to be of the school-girl class.

Five-and-thirty years of age, nearly six feet in height, more nearly gaunt than portly, with no superfluous lumber in his composition, but an athlete who was never out of training, and who was now in his very prime of life and sinewy vigor.

His face was bronzed by exposure to southwestern breezes and sunshine, and a faint touch of sunburn bleached the tips of his mustache and whiskers, naturally a rich, deep brown, almost the color of his eyes.

His chin was clean shaven, with the "fighting mark," or cleft down its center. And, though now in private dress, about him hung the peculiar air of camp and campaign which, once attained, never leaves a soldier.

In fact, Harlow Dangerfield was attached to one of the crack cavalry regiments as surgeon, and was an intimate friend of Captain Alfred Fitch, father to Emory, whose boyish cognomen had been "the Little Corporal," from a real or fancied resemblance to the famous Corsican, in features.

"I lost a day looking for you in Chicago," declared the surgeon, while awaiting for his order to be brought. "All I could find out at the old place was that you had gone to St. Louis. Sudden, wasn't it?"

"At ten minutes' notice, so far as mother was concerned. My aunt, her only sister, met with a severe accident, and mother came down to care for her. Life was no longer in danger, but recovery promised to

be so slow that mother thought it wisest to complete the removal. As we were only renting, that was easy work. And so—here we are!"

"A much briefer solution than I could make of it," commented the surgeon. "As I said before, I lost one entire day trying to find you in Chicago, after failing to ring you up at the address given me by your father."

"The letter must have miscarried, then, for I know word was sent him explaining our sudden change of base. Father sent a message, you said, did you not, doctor?"

"A message, and something else—yes," assented Dangerfield, an odd expression coming into his keen eyes as he spoke. "The first might have kept longer, but the other—well, 'twas a trust I preferred discharging as quickly as possible."

The face of Emory betrayed his rapidly rising curiosity, but just then the waiter came gliding toward them with a pyramid of dishes, and while the fragrant burden was being deposited before the surgeon, further questioning was barred.

When the waiter withdrew, young Fitch looked the curiosity he hardly knew how to put into plain words, and so bluntly asked:

"Of what nature is this trust, doctor?"

The surgeon cast a quick glance around them, his keen eyes taking thorough if brief note of each person in view. He seemed looking for enemy or trap of some description.

"Neither crazy nor dreaming, my boy, although your eyes are asking which."

"I didn't—that is—"

"Never mention it!" his tones growing softer as he leaned nearer his opposite, one finger tapping his own breast as he asked: "Your eyes ought to be sharp enough to see—*this*."

Guided by that finger-tip, young Fitch saw a small cut or tear in the dark cloth almost directly above the surgeon's heart, and leaning forward in his turn, Emory discerned that the place had been recently darned.

Now unbuttoning his coat and turning back the lapel, the doctor showed a yet undarned hole in his vest to match the other, and a moment later, his finger-tip was tapping upon the linen beneath, where a third hole was lightly edged with scarlet.

The stiffly starched linen had better retained the shape and size of that cutting instrument, and as Emory Fitch caught sight of those dim yet significant stains, an ejaculation broke from his lips.

"Right enough, but you needn't publish it in all the papers, my lad," warned the surgeon, closing his garments over that tell-tale sign, and flashing another wary glance around the room.

The hour was rather late for the class of customers who patronized that particular establishment, and less than half a dozen persons were visible, besides themselves. None of these betrayed any interest in the couple at that table, and, satisfied on that point, Doctor Danger turned back to his puzzled companion.

"What does all that mean, doctor?"

"It means that I hold a trusted in charge which put my life in danger, yet which just as surely saved that same life!"

Instead of giving more light, these words merely added to the young man's mystification.

"You can't exactly make that out, Little Corporal? Well, when a furlough came my way for a couple of months, and your father found that duty would hold him to the post for an indefinite time, he trusted me with a valuable package to deliver to his wife, your mother."

"Even without a warm friend at each end of the route, comradeship would have led me to accept that charge, though I doubt not Captain Alf would have chosen some other method of sending his package had he even dreamed of danger—"

"To you, do you mean, sir?"

"Doesn't this look something like it, lad?" tapping the perforated breast of his coat.

"Then that package—"

"Just as I'm trying to tell you, Little Corporal. That package was precious enough from more than one point of view, yet not so large but what it fitted snugly in this inside pocket—directly over my heart, as your eyes will tell you. My life was attempted, as I firmly believe for the sole pur-

pose of obtaining that same package, but it was thick enough to break the force of the blow, and I came off uninjured, as you see me!"

"But, who made the murderous attempt, sir?"

"That is part of the riddle, my dear boy."

CHAPTER II.

THE SMUGGLER'S TREASURE.

EMORY FITCH sunk back in his chair with a half-frown coming to his handsome face.

The surgeon was shrewd enough to divine this impatience.

"I mean to tell you, Emory, else I'd never have broached the matter. It is your right to know all, and when I transfer that same trust, it is possible I may also transfer something far less desirable with it."

"What is the trust, then, doctor?"

"That belongs to the story, too," was answered, drawing forth his watch for a glance at the dial. "Time enough for the telling, too, according to your lazy office hours in town. And as well in here as elsewhere, I imagine."

"That is for you to decide, sir," assumed the young man, as those magnetic eyes caught his inquiringly. "My time is yours, of course, although I'll need a more than reasonable excuse for delaying so long when mother knows of your being in town."

"I'll help you carry that same excuse, Corporal," and settling himself in his chair as though making ready for a tolerable stay, the surgeon proceeded:

"You glance over the army notes in the daily papers, of course, so must know that we have had quite a hustle after the smugglers and stock-rustlers along the Rio Grande?"

"Yes, sir. More trouble than profit, I should say, though."

"That's as you care to look at it, lad. Nothing less than a pitched battle in force, or a massacre of an entire scouting squad, seems of importance enough to catch the reportorial eye, nowadays; but, for all that, the boys in blue are hardly rusting out their terms on the border!"

"Take this little trouble we've been having with Vincente Gayferos, the smuggler, bandit, horse and cattle thief, with a wicked spice of revolutionary tactics thrown in to make good measure, for an instance."

"At widely separated intervals, one, two, half a dozen lines crept into the papers, and one-half of those notes scored our boys deeply for inefficiency, to use the mildest term; but, what were the actual facts? I'll tell you."

So far the surgeon had spoken with growing heat, evidently feeling the matter keenly; but now he caught himself up.

"No I won't, either! You're a soldier's son, and if there's aught of Captain Alf in you, you already know as much as I could tell."

"I know that the papers of the day seem to hold a strong grudge against our regulars; though why they should is beyond my telling."

"Or that of any other sane individual; but, let that point pass; I'll tell you something more personal."

"You know, then, that Captain Alf's company had a brush with the knaves under command of Gayferos, but you *don't* know just how much that brush meant."

"For one thing, we had a mixed fight and chase which lasted for more than a week before we so cornered the enemy as to compel him to stand up and take as well as give. Then we proceeded to wipe out the gang pretty completely, although the round-up failed to show us the head imp of all!"

"Then Gayferos eluded you?"

"For the time being, yes, and then, as matters simmered down, a few of us who had been on the trail pretty constantly for six weeks, took a brief lay-off, leaving the post on a hunt, but before our vacation was two days old, we were hot on the trail of a fellow we felt confident could be none other than the wily Gayferos, and fortune hit on me to bring the rascal to bay, and Captain Alf was with me when the finish came."

The doctor cast another searching glance around the room before adding:

"I killed the smuggler in the fight which

followed, for he would not surrender, and they were four to us two. We downed them, thanks to our guns, and while I was looking over the field, trying to keep the last spark of life in the Mexican's body, Captain Alf made another important discovery.

"The sound of firing brought up a squad of Rangers, and as they seemed willing enough to accept the credit of wiping out that remnant of the gang, we concluded to let it go at that, because Captain Alf and I concluded it would be just as well to have our laurels adorn other brows, for too bright a blaze of glory might show up the treasure found by the captain."

"A treasure, sir?"

"No less, Emory! Vicente Gayferos was engaged in smuggling when we caught him, or else he had concluded it wisest to carry all his wealth about with him until the chase for him cooled down, for when he met his death, a package containing money and unset but cut and polished diamonds fell into our hands, the whole of exceeding value."

"And this treasure? But, the Government?"

"Doubtless would have put in a claim had we been foolish enough to publish our discovery, but, why should we? We were not on duty at the time, but on a vacation as private citizens. If we had met with personal loss during that time, we would have had no just claim against the Government; then why should the Government have a right to our private gains made during that same vacation?"

"You shared it, of course, doctor? And my father—he sent his to mother?"

"Yes, to both questions, my lad. There was no other claimant, so far as we knew, at the time, and so we made a fair division of both money and stones; and as I had a furlough due me for some little time past, I concluded to take it right at this time."

"Your father expected to come with me, but an unforeseen turn of duty caught him, and rather than keep so much money and money's worth with him at the Post, he gave me the package, bidding me place it in the hands of his wife, your mother."

"Was it—a considerable sum, then, doctor?" asked Fitch.

"I stopped over one night at San Antonio, to put matters in more compact shape for the journey to Chicago, and while I left my share at the bank there, on deposit, I procured large bills and made a package of your father's share. Not counting the diamonds, which will probably net double that amount, that package contained just ten thousand dollars in bank-notes."

"So much as that? Then the treasure came to sixty thousand?"

"Nearly enough to call it that for short," assented the surgeon.

"And you brought the cash with you? Why didn't you take exchange, or ship it by Express? Surely that would have been both easier and safer?"

"From one point of view, perhaps; but we concluded not to leave any record behind us to suggest awkward questions, corporal."

"I expected to find you and your mother in Chicago, of course, since Captain Alf had heard nothing of your change of base. I did not stop again until I hit the city, or I might never have reached Chicago."

"As it was, I had barely left the hack which took me from depot to hotel, before a veiled woman assaulted me with knife and pistol, missing my life more through her own crazy haste than any good management on my part."

"She stabbed you, then?" with a glance toward that hole in his coat.

"Not then. I dodged her blow, and her shot went wild. I tripped on the pave, and before I could recover, the woman had disappeared in the darkness, and all search was made in vain."

"Well, that little affair warned me to be on guard, so I at once deposited my trust in the hotel safe, taking a receipt. 'Twas too late to think of looking you up that night, but I was afoot early in the morning, only to discover that your address represented an empty house."

"I looked the house-agent up, and learned that you had left the city, going to St. Louis, according to the best of his belief. And so,

as my principal business concerned you two, and I had nothing of sufficient importance to detain me longer in Chicago, I secured my trust from the hotel safe, and took the first train for here."

"Warned by my recent experience, and beginning to at least suspect what it might mean, I kept both eyes on the keen alert until I was fairly under way; but I saw nor heard anything to give me fresh uneasiness."

"Nothing happened worth mentioning until Alton was reached, nor then until our train was just beginning to pull out."

"I was half asleep, tired of reading, knowing not a soul aboard, of course, and paid no attention to who might be getting on or off at that station. But then—I was awakened, with a vengeance!"

"As I said, the train was just starting, when a hand gripped me by the chin, jerking my head back to catch a glimpse of a pale yet dark face with blazing eyes; then the flash of steel as a dagger cut down, straight for my heart!"

"I felt the stroke, then another blow on my head, as with a sandbag or leather-covered billy. That knocked me nearly senseless, and before any other person could fairly realize what was up, the fellow—he was tall, slender, in men's clothes—had darted away and leaped off the train, risking his neck while doing so."

"Then he escaped? Why didn't you stop the train and go back?"

"He escaped, and so did I, thanks to the package, as I said before; and I now believe that same package was the cause of both assaults, for my last assailant cursed me in Spanish, a la vendetta!"

Doctor Danger laughed softly as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER III.

DOCTOR DANGER WAXES EMPHATIC.

THE face of Emory Fitch showed how strongly he was interested in this narrative, which certainly savored more of the far southwestern border than the heart of civilization.

"Then you really think this man was one of the border gang?"

"If man it was, yes. I believe the double assault on me was caused by the treasure Captain Alf found, and which I held in charge, at least in part. And yet—well, both times she or he showed more anxiety for my death than for the package I had in my custody."

Emory drew a long breath at this, then said:

"It must have been worth more than a trifle, then!"

"Well, rather. For instance, there were sixty notes, nearly all crisp and fresh from the press. Fifty were for one hundred dollars each, and the rest were worth five hundred apiece. Then, counting in the diamonds at something like double those figures, and you have a tolerable idea of what I had undertaken to transfer."

"Something like thirty thousand dollars! And all yours, you say, doctor?"

"All yours, Little Corporal, or will be as soon as I can find your mother, Captain Alf's wife."

"She is living with my aunt at present, and I'll show you the way whenever you are ready to go."

"Thanks, my lad! I'll be glad in more senses than one. I surely was never cut out for a treasure-guard, and the sooner I am fully relieved of my trust the better I'll like it."

"It sounds so oddly! To think that such things can be, in these days! And you only know that your last assailant escaped by leaping from the train?"

"I couldn't be fully certain of even so much, only for what I was told later on by those in the coach with me when the assault was made. They said the fellow jumped off as the train gathered headway, and when they tried to catch sight again, nothing was to be seen."

"Pity the train wasn't stopped, to back up and arrest the fellow!"

"I doubt if he or she would have been found, even then."

"As I hinted, we were well away from Alton before I could rally my wits sufficiently to call the roll. I satisfied myself

that the package was safe in my pocket, and in making sure of this, I found out how it had saved me from death or an ugly injury."

"That dagger—a three-cornered affair, as you can see from my linen, sharp on all edges—had pierced the package, then pricked me sharply. Only for the compact bills, with the envelope and wrappings, that triangular point would have found my heart!"

"And all for us! I'm sorry—very sorry, doctor!"

"That is not so certain, either, my lad. No doubt the money and the diamonds had something to do with it all, but there was something stronger than avarice lying back of the double attempt."

"After that, nothing further of interest happened me, and reaching town, I at once hunted up an old friend living here, luckily finding him at his office."

"It was after banking hours when I struck town, else my course would have been simple enough. As it was, I hurried to the old address of this friend, Darius Gordon—you know him, perhaps?"

"The rich broker? Yes, I know him by sight, and in fact have a bowing acquaintance with the gentleman," answered Emory, evidently in some embarrassment.

"I was just in time, for Gordon was on the point of leaving his office for the day. As a friend, he placed the package in his safe, insisting on giving me a receipt for the same."

"Wouldn't it have been safer in a hotel safe, though?" asked young Fitch.

"I hardly think so. If a third attempt was to be made, what more natural than to think I had placed the package in the safe under the same roof as sheltered my head?"

"Unless you were followed to the office of Mr. Gordon."

"That could hardly be, unless the assassin left a confederate on board our train."

"If two, might there not be three, or even more of the knaves?"

"I think the two attempts were made by the same person. I know *the eyes* looked the same, and the build would match closely enough, allowing for the change of costume."

"I'll square up for my breakfast, then we'll go over to Gordon's office and reclaim the package. Late as city hours are, his clerk ought to have opened up by this time."

Lighting cigars at the cashier's desk, the two men passed out of the restaurant, locking arms as they struck the flagging, and Doctor Danger speaking in lowered but distinctly audible tones as they made their way toward the building in which Darius Gordon had his office.

"I noticed a grave alteration in Darius Gordon last evening, but we were both too hurried for much talk, or very critical observation. I believe you said you knew the old gentleman, Fitch?"

"Enough to pass the time of day, yes."

"Has anything gone wrong with his business affairs, think? He used to be a bold speculator, I remember. Has he been caught on the wrong side of the market, lately?"

"Just the contrary, I believe. At any rate, rumor credits him with clearing a modest fortune in both wheat and pork."

"That does not explain the change, for changed he is, and for the worse, too! I knew Darius Gordon as a son knows his own father, in the years gone by—and not so terribly many of them, either! Yet, when I met him face to face, last evening, I could hardly believe my eyes, he had aged so much, had altered so strangely!"

"Not from dread of approaching poverty, at all events," declared Fitch, with a brief, half-laugh, then added, in lowered tones: "Family troubles, possibly."

"Family troubles? His family is—only one daughter."

"Who married Martin Bridgewater, yes. You knew that, of course?"

"I knew Marian Gordon before she was married, yes. She is all that Darius Gordon has left in the way of a family, so—"

"I meant Mrs. Bridgewater, doctor."

"Surely not that *she* has given her father cause for growing old before his time? Careful, boy!"

With unusual sternness came this warning, but Emory did not quail.

"I'm keeping on the safe side of the danger-line, doctor. Mrs. Bridgewater may be

an angel, for all I know to the contrary, but Martin is a bit lower, or all rumors are lies."

"What can you know about them—about Martin Bridgewater's married life?" demanded the surgeon.

"Nothing more than is open to all the world," answered Fitch, regretting having touched that particular subject.

And then, too late, came the memory of a rumor which had reached his boyish ears, long ago; a rumor which coupled the names of Marian Gordon and Harlow Dangerfield.

"And that public knowledge amounts to just what, Fitch?"

"To this: that Martin Bridgewater was anything but a saint, in his earlier days, but that he has retrograded rather than improved since his wedding the beautiful heiress of the wealthy stock broker.

"All the world knows that he is a gambler, a sporting man, a high-roller wherever he goes; and those who know him best do not scruple to add that Bridgewater is rapidly killing himself with hard drinking.

"But, doctor, if it is your wish to learn still more, just make friends with Lorita Mason."

"And who may she be, Corporal?"

"My cousin, with whom we are living. She says little, but unwittingly has let fall enough to convince me that Mrs. Bridgewater leads anything but a blissful life."

"If I thought so—"

"Gain Lorita's confidence, and you can learn all, doctor. She is a bosom friend and confidante of Gordon's daughter, and while I can draw precious little from her, with you 'twill be different."

Although speaking with seeming frankness, there was something in all this that led the surgeon to believe Emory Fitch could say much more if he chose, but instead of pressing the point just then, his sinewy hand clinched tightly, his heavy brows contracted, and there came an ominous growl from his mustached lips:

"If he's ill-treating her, I'll kill the cur!" he vowed.

The doctor quickened his pace, and the two men advanced with greater rapidity, neither speaking again for several minutes.

Then, in lowered tones which were none the less deadly, Doctor Danger added:

"Mark it down, Little Corporal; if that fellow has ill-used Marian Gordon, I'll kill him with as scant mercy as I'd show a mad dog!"

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

As Doctor Danger gave utterance to that venomous vow, they came to the front of a tall, massive building which was given over to offices, even on the ground floor.

"This is the place," with an upward glance as he moved toward one of the entries. "Gordon holds forth on the third floor, but I prefer my own legs to taking the elevator. Still, if you wish—"

"Your will is mine, Doctor Danger."

"Then we'll climb the stairs, after the good old natural fashion," declared the surgeon, and soon both men stood before the office door bearing the name of Darius Gordon. Answering their knock the door was promptly opened by a wrinkled, almost withered-looking personage, whom the surgeon greeted cordially:

"Good-morning, Mr. Elder. My young friend, Emory Fitch."

"Morning, both. Will you wait, sir?"

"Then Mr. Gordon hasn't come down, yet?" asked the surgeon.

"Not yet; no sir," answered the clerk, fidgeting with increasing irritation, his bony fingers working like the nervous claws of an eagle. "He sometimes *don't*, you understand, sir, but—confound it *all*, I say!"

"What? Something seems to trouble you, Luke?" spoke up the doctor, as the clerk gave way to his emotions in spite of himself.

"And so it does, sir! So it does! And why not?" shuffling across to his own desk, there smiting the cloth-covered top with a bony hand while the forefinger of its mate pointed his next words.

"I've been keeping books for over fifty years—*fifty* years, sir! I've never missed a day at my desk, unless on a Sunday, or legal

holidays. I've never been guilty of— Somebody's been here since I locked up, last evening, sirs!"

Doctor Danger gave a start, and his eyes flashed a look into those of his young friend. Both seemed struck by the same ugly possibility.

"What has gone wrong that makes you think so, Elder?"

"What, is it? Isn't *this* enough?" catching up a penholder which lay on his desk, his wrinkled features full of angry disgust. "My red ink pen in the black ink well! And, see!" with another dramatic gesture, one bony forefinger sharply tapping a large blot on his desk cover. "For twenty-odd years I've stood at this desk, day in and day out, yet in all that time, a lady's lace kerchief might have dusted it without coming to harm! Now, *look*, gentlemen!"

Emory turned away, lest his irrepressible laugh should still further excite the indignant old clerk.

"Mr. Gordon may have been down-town, last night, and just dropped in to do a little hasty writing, Luke," the doctor suggested.

"And so misused my desk? No, sir! Mr. Gordon is a *gentleman*, sir! He could never be guilty of such indecent actions, sir! And—if that lazy rascal—but, *he* wouldn't *dare*, even!"

"The junior clerk, you mean, Elder?"

"Yes. He has not showed up, yet, although he should have been here to sweep out an hour ago! Going to the dogs—going to the dogs in spite of me, sir!"

The doctor glanced toward the massive burglar and fire-proof safe standing in one corner, then said:

"Since Mr. Gordon has not showed up, yet, Elder, may I ask you to give me the package I left here, last evening?"

"The one Mr. Gordon put in the safe, you mean, sir?"

"And for which he gave me this receipt, yes," answered Dangerfield, producing the receipt. "I wish to deliver the package to its rightful owner, and unless you expect Gordon soon—"

"He may come at any minute, or he may not show up until after noon, just as it happens to suit him best," grumbled the veteran, closely scanning the receipt through his horn-bowed glasses. "Only for *me*, there'd be no order or regularity at all about—you wish to reclaim the package mentioned here, you say, sir?"

"The same you saw the master place in his safe, yes. Of course you know the combination, Luke?"

But the clerk was already shuffling over to where the safe stood, and under cover of his bent body, was deftly working the silver disk.

Ten seconds later Luke Elder started back from the opened safe, with a sharp ejaculation which caused the surgeon to spring that way in haste.

"What's the matter, Elder?" he demanded, flashing a glance into the safe as soon as he noticed that the clerk's hands were empty.

"Where's the package?"

"Not there! *Gone!*"

"Not there? *Gone?* You're joking—or crazy, man alive!" and Doctor Danger pushed the clerk aside to give his own eyes free sweep of that dim interior.

He distinctly recalled the spot where Darius Gordon had placed the valuable package, but it was no longer there! Nor, after a united search, could aught be found of that portion of the smuggler's treasure!

Satisfied on this point, Doctor Danger drew back, leaving Luke Elder to make yet another search for the missing package. His bronzed face was grave, even troubled, but he forced a smile when he caught the anxious, almost awed expression visible upon the face of Emory Fitch.

"Don't worry, lad," he hastened to assure. "It's all right, or will be soon. Of course Gordon must have removed the package, and—"

"Of course he *didn't*, then!" almost viciously snapped the clerk, turning from his vain quest to meet their gaze. "Why should *he* do such an unusual, unbusiness-like action, pray?"

"The safe was not tampered with, was it, Mr. Elder?"

"Of course not. You saw me open it, sir."

"And *you* never removed the package, of course?"

"The idea! Of course I never meddled with it, sir!"

"Yet you were saying some person had been in the office since you locked up, last evening. The package is missing, but the safe is locked, and otherwise in perfect order. Now—how many know the safe combination, Luke?"

"Only the master and myself, doctor."

"There you have it, then!" with a long breath as of relief. "There is only one way to look at it, to my notion. Mr. Gordon came here for some reason, last night, and for some good and sufficient reason took the package home with him. Probably he thought it would be safer there than here, where no one remains on watch."

Luke Elder shook his head in negation, although plainly longing to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion concerning this mystery.

"'Twouldn't be business—not business-like, sir, I tell you!" he repeated, over and over, so deeply wrought up that he failed to notice the entrance of his junior clerk, Fred Whitley.

"There's a telephone," whispered Fitch. "Why not ring him up and ask if he removed the package?"

"Will you do that, Elder?" asked Dangerfield, quickly. "'Twill save us a tramp to his house, and I'm not sure I know where he lives, now. Not at the old homestead, does he, Elder?"

"Not now. I'll see—if he is awake, or in his room. If not, that poor, deaf creature—"

"Roger Quayle is still serving Gordon, then?" interrupted the doctor, a half-glad light of past memory flitting into his brown eyes.

Elder nodded assent, but was industriously working at the telephone, which appeared to be a private line, merely connecting the office with Darius Gordon's residence.

After spending nearly ten minutes thus, without an answer of any description, Luke Elder turned to young Whitley and sharply bade him make all haste to the house, there to rouse up the master, and beg him to lend ear to the telephone.

"What shall I tell him, Mr. Elder?"

"Just what I've told you, boy, and don't go to sleep along the wayside, either! Make haste, or you'll be minus a situation when the new week comes in, boy!"

Usually quiet, grave, reserved, almost meek of bearing, Luke Elder was entirely changed this morning. Everything seemed to be going wrong with him, and all to have started with the discovery of his scandalously-desecrated desk on opening the office.

Doctor Danger ventured a few remarks, but receiving only short, crabbed answers, he soon gave over, withdrawing to the side of Emory Fitch, who stood near the window looking down upon the street, now full of life and busy traffic.

"Gordon does not live with—with the Bridgewaters, then?" asked Doctor Danger, of his young friend, as he came to a halt at the window.

"No. I'm afraid there is little love lost between father and son-in-law, to tell the truth," was answered.

Then there came a rapid, irregular ringing at the telephone across the room, and both men turned that way with eager faces, while Luke Elder made haste to answer the summons from the house of his master.

"Who is it? Gordon himself, Elder?" asked Doctor Danger as the old clerk bent an ear in listening after answering the call so hurriedly given.

"What? Talk plainer, boy!" irritably said Elder, lips to the instrument. "You're buzzing worse than a whole nest of bumblebees!"

An ear took the place of lips, and then the message seemed more nearly articulate, though Elder again cried out:

"What? I can't—if you're playing a trick, you villain, I'll—*oh, my God!*"

The cry came in a shrill, cracked voice, and, dropping the ear piece Luke Elder staggered away, sinking to the floor in a shiver.

"What is it, man alive?" demanded Doctor Danger.

"*Dead—murdered! The master dead—murdered!*" gasped Elder.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERING THE TRAGEDY.

DOCTOR DANGER recoiled at those words of terrible import but rallying as quickly, he sprung across to the telephone and called into the receiver:

"What is it? What's gone wrong? Talk straight, or I'll wear you out for a malicious liar!"

He listened, but no answer came back. He called again and again, now upon the name of his old friend, Darius Gordon, then to the clerk, afterward sharply uttering the name of Gordon's faithful servant, Roger Quayle.

"But, all these efforts were in vain. Never a whisper came back by way of answer, and despairing of hastening matters through such means, the army surgeon turned away saying:

"You try it, Fitch. Keep calling, on the wild chance, while I—how goes it, Luke, old man?"

"Dead! Murdered!"

Huskily came the words from that shivering heap on the floor, but the old clerk could hardly be called conscious. That dreadful shock had dazed him completely, and though he shrunk from the friendly touch of the surgeon, 'twas purely mechanical, just like those indistinct pantings.

What was it you heard, Elder?" demanded the surgeon as he resorted to such methods of restoration as he well knew how to exercise. "Who spoke of murder? And of whom?"

"Dead—murdered!"

Still in that strange half-stupor, Elder mumbled those words, shivering, weaving to and fro, able to hear, yet scarcely alive enough in brain to comprehend what was said to him.

The doctor saw that this was merely the mental shock, from which the aged clerk would eventually rally, even if left to himself for the time being; and so, springing to his feet once more, he turned to say:

"Can't you call any one up, boy? Haven't you got an answer, yet?"

"Never so much as a whisper, sir, looks as though all hands had run away, for good and all, doctor!"

"I wish I had that fool clerk—keep on ringing, Corporal!"

"All right, sir, but I'm afraid it's no use."

"Do you know where the house is, then?"

"No, I don't, beyond the bare fact that it is out—"

"If 'twas only the old homestead, now!"

Unless Emory Fitch should succeed in winning an intelligible answer though the 'phone, his quickest, if not the only, chance of getting at the bottom facts of the case, Doctor Dangerfield knew lay in restoring Luke Elder to something like his customary state of mind.

The knowledge that Darius Gordon had removed from the old homestead left the surgeon all at sea, so far as the locality of the real or surmised tragedy was concerned; and while he doubtless might gain that information by applying to the first policeman met on the street, Doctor Dangerfield shrunk from the bare idea, as yet.

"Time enough for that when nothing better remains!" he told himself, as he fell to work over the clerk.

Although he had no artificial remedies to apply, the surgeon was not at a loss how to act, and in a very few minutes began to produce the desired effect, rousing Luke Elder from that half-stupor.

"It's a lie! It's all a vile, abominable trick on the part of that rascally knave, young Whitley!" huskily exploded Elder, now fully conscious and regaining his feet.

"What was it he called over the 'phone, then?"

"That the master was dead, murdered! The very idea! Why—oh, just let me get hold of the varlet, and if I don't—but I just will, though!"

Emory Fitch, still failing to receive any response to his impatient summons at the wire, now took opportunity to drop a whisper:

"Ask him to show us the way to the house, doctor. That ought to be the quickest way of getting at the bottom facts, don't you think, sir?"

Doctor Danger nodded assent.

"It's catching before flogging, and testing

before convicting, Luke, remember," he said, with forced composure. "After all, the fellow would hardly dare attempt a vile trick which would be so readily exposed. For of course you know the way to the house, Elder?"

"Of course I know the way to the house! Why wouldn't I, then, when I've taken it times beyond numbering? And now—oh, that graceless villain! That atrocious scoundrel! That—I'll break every bone in his lying skin the instant I catch him, so I will, now!"

"Unless he takes fright at my coming, and so gives you the slip, old friend," with forced lightness insinuated the surgeon. "Come, lad; I'm going to look after Darius Gordon my own self!"

"Wait until—I'm going along, but I've got to close up, first!"

With marvelous celerity for one of his usual deliberate motions, Luke Elder closed and fastened the big safe, caught up his hat and cane, then locked the office after them, and skurried off for the elevator.

For once Doctor Dangerfield had naught to say against the lift, and it is doubtful whether any part of his unusual pallor could be attributed to that detested method of covering space.

That was his only way of betraying the heavy shock he had received in the office so recently left, but Emory Fitch was shrewd enough to divine something of his secret sufferings, and in friendly whispers sought to convey at least a modicum of hope.

"There may be some mistake, sir. It may not be so bad—a young fellow like that is so easily frightened, sometimes, you know."

"Not frightened, sir, but lying—basely falsifying, sir!" again exploded Luke Elder, whose sharpened ears caught those words. "This isn't the first time I've caught Frederick Whitley playing his vile, practical pranks, but now—well, you'll see, sirs, you'll see!"

It was a really pitiful attempt on his part, for one could tell from his fear-blinded face and his nervously shivering limbs, that Luke Elder was fighting against dread conviction.

Still, it was better so for them, Doctor Dangerfield reasoned. Without some such stimulant as this, the old man would never have been able to act as guide with so little loss of time as now.

As it afterward proved, they were barely half way to the house of trouble, when the hurrying shape of the junior clerk was sighted, and as he recognized them in turn, his wildly gesticulating arms robbed the surgeon of his last ray of hope.

Not so with Luke Elder. The sight of his junior served to strengthen his limbs and add fire to his rancor, and nimbly springing upon the young fellow before a question could be asked or answered, his cane came into play, with tongue keeping time to the shower of vigorous strokes.

"Lie to me, will ye? Kill the master, eh? Oh, you atrocious—"

But Doctor Dangerfield was swift to rescue the bewildered clerk, and fairly tossing Elder into the arms of young Fitch for safe keeping, the surgeon questioned Whitley as to what had been discovered.

"Murder, no less, sir!" panted the clerk, too deeply agitated by the terrible experience which had been his, to as yet feel that partial caning as he surely would later on.

"Who has been murdered? Not Darius Gordon? The truth, now, sir!"

"The master—Darius Gordon—and butchered, sir!" declared young Whitley, beginning to rally under that magnetic gaze and firm grasp. "I went there—I saw—'twas horrible, sir, horrible!"

That firm grip turned the clerk to the right-about, and Doctor Dangerfield spoke gravely:

"Show us the nearest way back to the house, my friend. And now, tell the rest as we go along, please."

The natural reaction had come upon Luke Elder, and he was unable to interfere further for the present. Indeed, Emory was obliged to support his failing limbs, and for some little distance half carry the trembling veteran.

Thanks to this freedom from his superior's vengeance, and to the outward composure called into play by the surgeon, Fred Whitley quickly rallied sufficiently to give

a fairly connected account of his recent experience.

On reaching the house, he had found deaf old Roger Quayle astir, but nothing was to be seen or heard of their employer. The old servant flatly refused to rouse his master, but when Whitley sprung past him, to run up-stairs and perform that duty himself, Quayle yielded, and was given precedence by the young clerk.

Roger Quayle went first to the room in which his master was accustomed to sit while reading or writing, and as the door opened, Whitley looked over a shoulder to see—a bloody corpse!

He rallied so far as to spring to the telephone and ring up Luke Elder, but as soon as he could grasp forth the terrible intelligence, he rushed off to summon the police, or medical help.

This was the substance of what the junior clerk managed to tell during the remainder of that hurried journey. Doctor Dangerfield slipped in a number of questions, to which answers were given, but owing to the strong agitation of the young man, it is hardly worth while to record his words in full.

Even in those excited moments, Doctor Dangerfield fully recognized their comparative worthlessness.

Whitley was still speaking when a turn in the road brought them into fair view of a detached house, standing by itself in spacious grounds, and as the surgeon's keen eyes caught sight of a uniformed shape standing in front of the wide piazza, about the pillars, lattice and upper railing of which woodbine was twining luxuriantly, instinct warned him that their destination was nearly reached; a fact which Whitley confirmed an instant later, by exclaiming:

"There's the house now, sir!"

"With police in charge—worse luck!" muttered the doctor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

THIS fact was patent to all, even so soon, and while the hasty explanation given by Fred Whitley ought to have prepared them for something of the sort, the little party involuntarily slackened their pace.

Doctor Dangerfield was flashing a keen, comprehensive glance over the building, as though instinct already warned him of the work fate had been mapping out for his hand and brain during those past hours of darkness.

He saw a large, two-story frame building, along the front of which extended a wide veranda, supported at intervals in front by pillars, and with both ends closely latticed, the framework lending support to masses of woodbine, the dense foliage of which hid the building for yards, and the ambitious tendrils of which had mounted to the roof-tree in one place.

Apart from this wonderfully luxuriantly growing vine, there was nothing out of the common about the place: merely a comfortable, old-fashioned dwelling, such as any Southern city might afford.

As the doctor more than half expected, the officer on duty in front of the house, checked them as they drew nearer, politely but firmly barring their entrance, although they pleaded friendship for the owner.

"Sorry, gents, but you'll have to wait here until the chief comes, or sends word by a substitute."

"But, this is a medical man, sir!" expostulated Luke Elder, trembling like a leaf under his strong emotion.

"Can't help that, either, sir."

"If Gordon is hurt, or—let us pass, I demand, sir!"

"Not without a pass from the chief, or from Headquarters, sir."

"You have been in, then?" asked Doctor Dangerfield, with a silent gesture bidding Emory Fitch to look after the old clerk. "There is nothing to be done for the gentleman, then?"

"Nothing more than the coroner and undertaker can do best, sir," was the grim response. Ha! yonder comes the chief, at last!"

The sharp clatter of trotting hoofs along the macadamized road called notice that way, and the officer instantly recognized his superior in the driver, who drew his nag up under the wide-spreading white-elm tree

which found root nearly opposite the Gordon residence.

Even before the chief turned face that way, Doctor Dangerfield seemed to recognize a familiar figure, and the first glimpse of those grave, soldierly features confirmed his belief.

"Septimus Gowdy, on my life!" he ejaculated, a flush coming to his pale cheeks, and a glad light leaping into his troubled eyes.

"That's the chief of police, yes, sir," confirmed the officer on guard duty. "If you know him—"

"I used to know him, and maybe—"

The doctor strode quickly forward, with hand going out as the gaunt, gray-mustached face turned his way.

An instant's hesitation, then came recognition.

"Dangerfield? For a fact, it is! Shake, old man, and do it again!"

For a few seconds the old friends seemed to forget all else in this unexpected meeting, smiling into each other's faces as their fingers closed in cordial grip; then an uneasy movement on the part of Luke Elder recalled them to the present affair.

"Ugly business, this of Gordon's! Were you one of those who made the discovery, Harlow?"

"No. I was just coming to see what had gone wrong, as Gordon failed to keep an appointment made at his office for this morning. Your man, yonder, refused to give us admittance, though."

"Rightly enough, too, but with my voucher, 'twill be different. These gentlemen are your friends, and you can answer for them both, of course?"

The necessary explanations were quickly given, but when the officer was questioned by his superior, and declared that Darius Gordon was dead when found, being shot through and through the body, poor Luke Elder gave way, and lapsed into a stunned, dazed condition which rendered him absolutely helpless for the time being, so far as moving about was concerned.

Only taking time sufficient to place the grief-stricken clerk on the piazza, in one of the wide chairs which habitually stood there, Doctor Dangerfield and Emory Fitch followed the lead of Chief Cowdy into the house and up-stairs to the chamber of death.

A second officer was on guard at the top of the flight, but he saluted and silently gave passage to the trio as he recognized his superior officer.

Pushing open the door which was found standing ajar, they entered, stopping short when fairly inside the room.

Before them, nearly in the center of the long and somewhat narrow apartment, lay the corpse of Darius Gordon, almost as he had fallen under the touch of death.

Above him was the gasolier, both branches of which were still burning, casting an almost ghastly yellow glow over the scene of death.

Pausing barely long enough to take note of the chamber and its arrangements, Doctor Dangerfield just glanced inquiringly at the face of the chief, and receiving an assenting nod, he moved forward, sinking to his knees by the side of the dead man.

With face pale as that of the corpse, but with hands that showed not a tremor, the surgeon made a brief examination of the body, but without materially altering its position. That was hardly necessary, for one who had so often taken notes of violent deaths.

Doctor Dangerfield looked up to see a broad-shouldered, heavily-bearded man entering the room as he briefly reported:

"There is no hope, Gowdy. The poor fellow is dead—stone dead!"

The new-comer was whispering to the chief, upon whose face came the shadow of a frown, and Gowdy apparently failed to catch the words uttered by the surgeon.

Doctor Dangerfield rose to his feet.

"Detective Brown, doctor," explained Gowdy, catching the look of inquiry. "I out-paced him, but now he's here, I reckon we'd better begin at the beginning. And that is— Eh?"

"Where's the servants to be found?" bluntly asked the detective.

"There's only one, if I understand aright, and he is below, I fancy," answered the chief, turning away from the death-scene, a

hand lightly resting on an arm of the doctor. "You will bear me company, of course, Dangerfield?"

The doctor bowed in silence. Although this was very neatly and smoothly performed by the official, back of it almost surely lay the whisper given by the detective. Evidently he preferred being alone while making his preliminary examination of the body and its immediate surroundings.

There would be no use in raising any objections, and so the trio left the room, passing down stairs, Chief Gowdy pausing to speak with the policeman who had taken up his station at the front door; but Doctor Dangerfield and Emory Fitch passed to the left, into a room where they found the deaf old servant, Roger Quayle.

He, like Luke Elder, seemed nearly stupefied by the terrible discovery, but when he recognized Dangerfield, his joy was almost painful, through contrast.

"Go to him, doctor! Save him—you can—you must save his dear life!" hoarsely gasped the poor fellow, clinging to those friendly hands as a drowning wretch might fasten upon a floating log.

"Would to Heaven I might, Roger," huskily muttered the doctor, but then smothering back his strong emotion, to hurriedly ask: "Who called here last night, Quayle? Who was last to see the master?"

"Only—" the servant began, but as he caught sight of Chief Gowdy at the open doorway, he broke off sharply.

"Only—whom?" sternly demanded the chief, catching the word.

"Nobody but me!" declared Roger, although one so deaf as he could hardly have understood the question asked, even in that clear tone. "I never dreamed of this—how could I, then?"

Chief Gowdy repeated his question, but Roger said nothing. If the words reached his dulled senses, nothing betrayed that fact, and Doctor Dangerfield hastened to the rescue.

"The poor fellow is deaf as a post, chief, and has been for more years than I can remember. Shall I ask him? I could always make him hear better than any other save—his master."

That was not the name or sex Doctor Dangerfield had in mind, but somehow he could not even mention the name or title of the woman whom he had loved so long and so well, under that death-roof!

Without waiting for permission, Dangerfield took that wrinkled hand in his own warm palm, and put question after question to the servant, at times being forced to repeat his words, but as a general thing winning both hearing and an answer with wonderful ease, all things considered.

Roger could throw very little light upon that awful taking-off. He had heard no unusual sounds during the night, and although Mr. Gordon was rather late in making his appearance for breakfast, which Roger invariably prepared for him, that was by no means an alarming circumstance.

"I just thought he was sleeping later than usual, and so— Then, when the young man from the office came, I refused to call. And I only went up when— He would go, and so— Dead, God pity us all!"

The old servant gave way completely, now, and covering his face with both hands as he sunk down in a heap on the lounge, painful sobs shook his gaunt frame from crown to sole.

As this came to pass, a low cough from just outside the door drew attention that way, and once more Detective James Brown was recognized by the doctor and young Fitch.

"I'm ready to look over the place now, if you are, sir," he said, to the chief of police.

"Unless you are too busy here, of course."

"This part can wait a bit longer, and be all the better for the delay, I fancy, Brown. Do you want me alone, or—"

"This gent is a doctor?"

Chief Gowdy hastened to complete the introduction, and greeting the soldier with cordiality, Detective Brown blandly said:

"Nothing could fit in better! I can tell when a man has passed over well as the next person, but when it comes to deciding just how long an interval—you can tell that, sir?"

"Approximately, at least," gravely answered the doctor, as they once more mount-

ed the stairs, being joined by the chief after he had suavely begged Emory Fitch to keep a friendly eye over the grief-stricken servant.

This bit of diplomacy did not escape the notice of the surgeon, but he kept his feeling locked within his own bosom for the present. To object to this exclusion of his young friend, might result in his own non-admission to the death-chamber.

So far as his first swift, suspicious glance could tell him, nothing had been shifted or altered by Detective Brown during the few minutes he had won the room to himself.

The corpse lay just as left, the gas was still burning, and at the further end of the room, close by the desk, showed the window with sash still raised, but with the venetian blinds fastened as before.

"How long has the gent been dead, do you reckon, doctor?" asked Detective Brown, after a brief silence. "Take your time, please, for it may make all the difference between life and death to some one!"

CHAPTER VII.

VIEWING THE CORPSE.

THERE seemed to be a veiled meaning to this speech, but Doctor Dangerfield, who had taken one of those strong if unaccountable dislikes to the detective, passed it by without remark, moving toward the body, then giving it a closer, more critical examination than he had been able to do before.

The wound was almost certainly that of a gun or a pistol-shot, and the bullet had apparently passed directly through the body, which was still lying in a pool of coagulated blood.

The face, smoothly shaven save for little tabs of silvery-white whiskers near each ear, was ghastly pale, as might have been expected; but upon that face was frozen an expression of horror, or of some powerful emotion stronger than mere physical pain, which went to prove that death had not come so instantaneously as to preclude some thought.

Chief Gowdy watched the surgeon's movements with keen interest, and as he saw those slender yet sinewy limbs tested, he asked:

"How long do you judge he has been dead, Dangerfield?"

"That is not so easily decided, sir," came the grave reply. "As you can see, *rigor mortis* is complete, and judging from that fact, I should say, not less than seven or eight hours."

The minister of law arched his brows, lips puckering as though to give a prolonged whistle. Instead, he spoke, and right or wrong, the surgeon felt that his tones contained something very like a sneer.

"And you, a master of your art, doctor! Why, I thought surgery could predict with far more accuracy than that!"

"Under favorable circumstances it can, sir," came the cold reply. "Even you, a layman, ought to know that circumstances vary, and that what might fit one case, would entirely miss another."

"Take it as a general rule, *rigor mortis* sets in about seven hours after death, and this condition of rigidity usually lasts something like thirty hours; but cases are on record where a corpse has shown no signs of *rigor mortis* for more than a day, and others where the rigidity has passed off in ten hours or less, or continued for over a week."

"In still plainer terms, it's pretty much all guess-work?" suggested Detective Brown.

"That is leaning too far in the opposite direction, sir," retorted Dangerfield, rising to his feet. "Given a thorough understanding of a patient's physical health, together with the exact circumstances of his death, and your questions could be answered almost to the minute; but knowing only what I see here, I can simply repeat what I said before: I judge death came to Darius Gordon not less than eight, nor more than twelve hours ago."

"That would limit the deed to after ten o'clock last night, then," said Chief Gowdy, glancing at his watch, "and not later than two, this morning?"

"To the best of my judgment, yes, sir," assented the surgeon.

As the doctor gave this answer, an officer

appeared at the door, saluting his superior, then saying:

"Coroner arrived, your Honor. Has a jury with him. Shall he pass?"

"Certainly. Tell him to come up. And we, gentlemen," turning back and including both Dangerfield and the detective, "had better wait until after Montrose has done his duty, I reckon, before going further."

Doctor Dangerfield drew aside at this, and in grave silence watched what followed the entrance of the coroner and his jury.

This was little more than a matter of form, for few questions were asked, and only a casual examination given the body and its surroundings under the coroner's supervision. Then, naming time and place for their meeting in session, the corpse was formally turned over to the police authorities.

The usual forms having been complied with, Chief Gowdy seemed more at his ease, and even assisted the surgeon in examining the body, looking for other wounds than that which showed itself in blood.

Meanwhile Detective Brown went prowling about the room, prying here and there, peering into the pigeon-holes of the desk, and moving each piece of furniture, only to carefully replace it as it had been before.

"Well, what do you make of it Dangerfield?" at length asked Chief Gowdy. "Accident, suicide, or murder?"

"Hardly the first, certainly not the second, most likely the last," responded the surgeon, still upon his knees beside his dead friend.

"How can you be so confident as to *suicide*, Harlow?" asked Gowdy, glancing toward the other end of the room, where Detective Brown stood by the open desk. "For one thing, where is the weapon which caused death?"

"Here!" came the deep tones of the detective, and as the others glanced that way, it was to see him lift a revolver from a partly opened drawer at the lower side of the walnut desk. "This could have done the work, I reckon, and the muzzle shows signs of recent powder-smoke, too!"

With an exclamation of growing interest, Chief Gowdy passed over to the desk, and together they examined the weapon.

It proved to be of Smith & Wesson make, of thirty-eight caliber, and was the ordinary pocket-sized revolver, five shots.

"Hammer clear down, you see, chief, and—look!"

Detective Brown lifted the hammer far enough to partly revolve the plated cylinder, then exhibited one empty shell: the same on which the pointed hammer had rested a few seconds before.

Having ascertained so much, they moved back to where Doctor Dangerfield had remained, but he was ready with an answer to defend his views.

"For one thing, Mr. Brown, the drawer was *closed* until you opened it; but, let that pass. Here is all the proof essential, I take it. The shot was fired *from behind Gordon's back!*"

A sinewy finger pointed out the proof: powder-marks on the coat, and a tiny hole where a spark had eaten until quenched by the flow of blood from the death-wound.

Both chief and detective examined the body more carefully than before, but neither seemed fully convinced that Doctor Dangerfield was right.

"A man *could* have held the revolver behind his back, and caused just such another wound," argued Gowdy, then adding in quickened tones. "But—look! Another shot, surely!"

While pursuing his examination alone, Doctor Dangerfield had cut away a portion of the clothing in front, where the blood had clotted badly, and now the chief, pointing his meaning with eager fingers, called attention to the widely differing location of the two holes, that in front being almost if not quite six inches higher than the one behind.

"Looks that way, for a fact!" declared Brown, bending lower over the body, then asking in his turn: "What do *you* make of it, doctor?"

"One wound," came the reply. "The bullet entered here, passing through the body at the angle you see. There is no other evidence of violence, and—"

"Excuse me!" cut in the detective, a stubby forefinger touching that high, cold, forehead. "This bruise, doctor?"

"Probably caused by falling, after receiving the death-shot, sir."

Detective Brown shook his bullet-head in negation as he caught the eyes of Chief Gowdy, and his tones more nearly matched his bull-dog visage as he spoke again:

"Of course I'm running a risk in going contrary to your line of argument, doctor, but this is how it looks to *my* eyes: a case of killing, after an angry quarrel!"

"Explain your meaning further, Brown," ordered Gowdy.

"All right, sir, since 'twill go no further than we three," assented the detective. "I conclude, from this bruise, that there was a quarrel, in which Gordon was knocked down by a fist. Then, while he was on hands and knees, trying to rise up, he was shot from behind by his adversary, who stood almost over the old gent. And that accounts for all, you see?"

"Except the bullet!" suggested Chief Gowdy, his eyes scanning the carpeted floor near where the body had been found. "That passed clean through the body, and ought to be close at hand, according to your theory."

"Not necessarily, sir. Its force must have been pretty well spent, biting a passage, and it may have rebounded after striking the carpet, without leaving a mark sufficient to catch the keenest of eyes."

With his instinctive dislike for the detective doubled in power by this offensive manner, Doctor Dangerfield had risen to his feet and withdrawn a pace or two, leaving the others to talk and to seek proof of their theory.

But now, as the sickly scent of gas annoyed him, the surgeon glanced toward the gasolier, and his keen eyes caught sight of something that sent a hot flush to and from his bronzed face.

Stepping forward, he deftly took possession of an ordinary-sized advertising calendar which had been hanging from the gilt knob at the lower portion of the fixture, slipping it into his breast, then saying:

"There is no need of letting the gas burn longer, chief?"

"Of course not, doctor. Put it out, please," came the answer.

The army surgeon obeyed, then stepped back, outwardly cool and composed as ordinary, but with just the hint of a sneer curling his lip as he watched Detective Brown still groping with spread fingers over the carpet for the bullet his eyes sought in vain.

Leaving him at his work, Chief Gowdy passed across to the desk, which stood close to the front window, as already mentioned.

He placed the revolver in the drawer from whence Brown had taken it, closing the drawer as before, then began methodically examining the desk itself, with its varied contents.

This was a neat piece of furniture, of black walnut, with a roll-top, now turned back, and amply supplied with pigeon-holes, etc.

Close in front of the desk an office-chair of the ordinary revolving pattern was standing, and sinking into this, Chief Gowdy fell to work looking through the papers, after taking an eye-photograph of the place before touching aught.

Detective Brown had not succeeded in finding the lost bullet, when a sharp exclamation from Chief Gowdy attracted attention, an open half-sheet of writing paper in his left hand as his right motioned the men to come his way.

"Come, and listen," he said, his gleaming eyes swiftly glancing over the lines of writing upon that paper. "I found this note right here, and it reads as though—but listen!"

There was no date to the paper, but at the head stood the boldly written name of the now dead stock broker, after which came the words:

"D. GORDON, ESQ.—"

"I will call on you this evening, to meet charges and defend myself against all enemies—yourself included!"

"M. B."

"Who bears those initials?" asked Chief Gowdy, tapping the sheet of paper sharply as he finished that brief reading.

"I'll never pick the one out of many," drily answered Detective Brown, giving his broad shoulders a shrug as those gleaming eyes rested upon his face with that question.

"Martin Bridgewater, for one," impulsively suggested Doctor Dangerfield, but adding even more swiftly: "Gordon's son-in-law; but, surely, *he* is far beyond suspicion of such—*of course he is*, man alive!"

"I'm taking nothing for granted, just now, doctor," drily assented Gowdy, rising to his feet. "Where's that deaf old servant?"

CHAPTER VIII.

SEEKING MORE LIGHT.

"WITH young Fitch, where we left him, no doubt," answered Dangerfield, in tones far less firm than they had been but a few minutes before. "It will be barbarity to put him upon the rack again, Gowdy!"

"Shall I fetch him up, chief?" asked Detective Brown, bluntly.

"If you will be so kind, yes," answered the representative of the law, with a slight bow. "Don't frighten the poor fellow more than you can help, Brown. He's little better than dazed, as it stands now."

"Or tries to make you think so," bluntly declared the detective, striding along the apartment and vanishing from their sight.

"As brutal a vulgarian as I ever had the black luck to have dealings with!" grimly muttered the surgeon, frowning his strong disgust. "Why have you brought *him* into the case, Gowdy?"

"For lack of a better man, Dangerfield. I'll admit he's not built of velvet, but a keener nose never struck a blind trail! And, unless this bit of paper pans out rich in color, I'm afraid we've struck precisely that sort of a job, old friend!"

The doctor reached out a hand to take possession of that brief note, and thus his lids veiled what might have proved a telltale glitter which he could hide in no other fashion. But his tones were well under command once more as he spoke again:

"Granting that this note was written by Bridgewater, chief, there's nothing to show *when* it was written. There is no date, you observe? And, even if those initials *do* stand for his name, what object could he possibly have for doing—oh, I'll never think it—*never!*"

Returning the paper, Doctor Dangerfield turned abruptly away from the desk, but not so far that Chief Gowdy had to lift his voice higher than ordinary to make his words heard.

"Nor I until I have to, Dangerfield; but you'll hardly deny that yonder deaf old fellow was keeping something in reserve?"

A hot flush came to that averted face, but it was banished almost as swiftly, and Doctor Dangerfield faced the chief with seeming frankness, to make reply:

"I'll not admit *that*, Gowdy. Old Roger was turned nearly crazy by the horrible discovery he made, and my only wonder is that he was able to speak so fairly, so coherently, even."

"Except when he first caught sight of me, at the door," amended the other, with a grim smile lighting up his stern face. "When you asked, and he was about to tell, who called on Darius Gordon last evening. You can hardly have forgotten how terribly deaf he grew, all at once, friend?"

Before Dangerfield could answer this, footsteps were heard, and as both men glanced toward the door, it was pushed open to admit Detective Brown, whose strong arm was almost forcing the poor old servant along.

Doctor Danger moved that way, frowning blackly, but before he could interfere, Roger Quayle caught sight of the old master, lying there in his gore, and breaking away from the detective, he staggered quickly forward, sinking to his knees beside the body, groaning in bitter grief.

"Give the poor fellow time, can't you?" sternly muttered Doctor Danger, as he checked a forward movement on the part of the detective. "*He* has a heart that can feel, even if the rest of us are lacking in that respect!"

Kneeling there beside the dead, Roger Quayle moaned and groaned in his bitter grief, for the time being paying no attention to the other persons in that death-chamber. But through all, not a word fell from those grief-blanching lips which could fix or confirm suspicion, although both chief and de-

tective were eagerly waiting and hoping for some such clue, to cast more light upon this dark tragedy.

Not until the old body-servant had partly exhausted his woes did Chief Gowdy interfere, but as time passed on without bringing with it the clue he deemed possible, he called the attention of Quayle his way.

"When did Martin Bridgewater call here last, Quayle?"

The old man gave a mechanical salute, but nothing of comprehension appeared in his tear-dimmed eyes, even when that question was repeated in much louder tones than at first.

"He is very deaf, sir," gently reminded Doctor Danger, as he saw how sternly the chief was frowning upon the poor fellow.

"And none so deaf as those who prefer not hearing," dryly suggested Detective Brown. "Shall I put the question, Gowdy?"

"Let Dangerfield do it, first," hesitatingly answered the other. "Try your hand, doctor; he seemed to catch your voice easily enough, down-stairs."

"He was calmer, then," with a bit of a shiver as he glanced toward the ghastly face of the dead man. "I'll try, but—When was Mr. Bridgewater here for the last time, Roger? Don't speak too quickly, but take all the time you need for making sure. Now—when was it?"

The surgeon spoke deliberately, sounding each syllable, and though his tone was several degrees lower than employed in vain by Chief Gowdy, he fully expected it to pierce that befogged brain without much difficulty, just as it had so frequently in days gone by.

But Roger Quayle only shook his head, helplessly, that frightened, dazed expression growing more pronounced upon his wrinkled visage.

"I can't hear," he huskily declared, after Doctor Danger repeated that question. "I can't—oh, master! My poor, dear master!"

A choking sob filled his throat, and the old fellow dropped again to his knees beside the dead man, shivering violently as he sobbed and groaned and moaned in abject misery.

"Turn him over to me, and I'll engage to make him answer all the questions you see fit to put, chief," coldly said Detective Brown.

"Better knock the poor fellow in the head at once!" indignantly cried the surgeon, thoroughly disgusted with the brutal fellow, now. "I will make Quayle comprehend what is wanted, if you'll only grant me a few more minutes, Gowdy."

Taking pencil and paper-tablet from his breast pocket, Doctor Danger wrote the question down, in large, plain characters, then gently roused the servant, making him read the written words.

Even then the poor fellow seemed too greatly broken down in mind, as in body, to fairly comprehend what was wanted of him; and still in hopes of saving him from worse treatment, Doctor Danger wrote again:

"You *must* tell us all that happened, to your knowledge, last night. Remember, it is to avenge the murder of our friend, your master!"

This seemed to at least in part brush away that benumbing stupor, and both looking and acting more naturally, Roger Quayle complied.

He spoke of Darius Gordon coming home the evening before, seemingly feeling something out of sorts, although declaring his health perfect when questioned on that point by his anxious servant.

He spoke of preparing supper, of which the master partook but sparingly, then retired to this apartment, where he customarily passed the hours between supper and bedtime.

"Did you see him after he came up-stairs?" asked the chief.

"No, sir," as readily as one with perfect hearing. "He said there was nothing more that I could do or get for him, and that I might go to bed as early as I liked, as he expected company that evening, and they might stay until late."

"That begins to sound a little more like it!" declared Chief Gowdy, as his hands rubbed smartly together and his dark eyes gleamed anew. "Did that expected company come, though?"

Roger Quayle did not answer this query,

but with a troubled look his eyes sought those of his one firm friend, Doctor Danger.

"Odd how it comes and goes, isn't it?" softly murmured Detective Brown, smiling at the white ceiling overhead.

"Who called on your master, last night?" sternly cried the chief of police, in tones so loud that even the deaf servant could not help hearing him; but Roger Quayle flushed painfully, shrinking from the others and drawing closer to the surgeon, in whom alone he recognized a friend.

But Gowdy was not to be baffled so easily, and sternly added:

"Better tell all you know while free and here, Quayle, than when under arrest and in the sweat-box. Now—will you chirp?"

"Speak freely, Roger," gravely urged the surgeon, clasping one of those trembling hands between his warm palms. "The innocent have naught to fear, and the guilty deserve no shelter! Who came here last night?"

"I caught a glimpse of a man going up the stairs, sir, but—"

"Who was it, Roger?"

"I couldn't—see his face, sir," falteringly.

"Who was it?" repeated Chief Gowdy, in still sterner tones, knowing from that flinching figure and embarrassed face that Quayle was trying to hold something back. "You surely recognized that person, even if you *did* fail to see his face distinctly. So—*who was the man?*"

"It was—I knew the overcoat—Martin Bridgewater!" huskily panted the servant, evidently finding the words very hard to utter.

"By his overcoat, eh?" asked the chief. "And you failed to see his face, you say? Yet you have not the ghost of a doubt as to the real identity of that visitor, have you, sir?"

Roger Quayle, having passed the worst point, seemed to rally his nerve, and each succeeding reply came with greater freedom.

"I knew it was Mr. Bridgewater, sir, even without the coat. I recognized his shape, and his manner of mounting the stairs, one step with his right foot, then giving a spring that took two with his left. You recall that peculiarity, doctor?" turning toward Dangerfield.

Doctor Danger bowed assent, but said nothing. His face was very pale, his jaws were firmly set. Just then he seemed suffering even more severely than the old servant had suffered a bit before, though after an entirely different fashion.

"How long did he remain up-stairs, Quayle?" asked the chief. "When did Mr. Bridgewater take his leave, please?"

"That I can't tell you, sir," declared the old man, his eyes veiling themselves, and something of his former dullness beginning to show itself. "I went to bed, and knew nothing more until—this morning, when—Oh, my poor master! Dead—done to death so cruelly!"

Roger Quayle broke fairly down, and would have flung himself upon that blood-stained corpse, only for the swiftly restraining hand of Doctor Danger, who spoke almost harshly as he glanced toward the chief.

"He's told all he knows, Gowdy, and to question him further now would be rank barbarism! At least grant him time to rally from this awful shock."

Without waiting for an answer, Doctor Danger supported the sobbing, moaning, shivering wretch to the door, then assisted him down-stairs.

Chief Gowdy followed after, leaving Detective Brown in the death-chamber for the time being.

A stern frown marked the high official's face as he watched Quayle conducted to his room, below stairs, and pausing near the policeman who kept guard over the front entrance, Gowdy spoke in a swift whisper:

"Keep an eye on that old fellow, Norris, and if he *should* make an offer to leave the premises, give him the collar that instant!"

The officer bowed his comprehension, then, trusting to an acquaintance which had birth years before Septimus Gowdy ever dreamed of being at the head of the St. Louis police force, he asked:

"Surely you don't think *he* harmed old Gordon, sir?"

"*Somebody surely did*, Norris, and Roger Quayle knows far more than he cares to tell!" declared Gowdy, with grim emphasis.

CHAPTER IX.

DOCTOR DANGER BEGS FOR GRACE.

THE surgeon remained but a few minutes with the broken-down old servant, then came from the room to join the chief of police, who was still below-stairs.

"May I say a word or two with you in private, old friend?" was the surgeon's address, and with a silent nod, Septimus Gowdy passed by the officer on duty, moving toward the west end of the long and broad veranda.

Nothing more was spoken until the two men were at the end of the covered walk, close to the woodbine-covered lattice-work, but then Doctor Danger said, in low, guarded tones:

"You'll surely not pay any attention to the words old Roger let drop, Gowdy? The poor fellow is more than half-crazed with grief for his master, and really not accountable for what passed his lips."

"So you *say*, Harlow, but do you really *believe* all that?"

"Of course I do, and so ought you!" firmly declared the surgeon, his eyes boldly encountering that half-quizzical gaze. "No court in the wide land would accept such as legal evidence, Gowdy!"

"Possibly not as evidence, but something which might easily lead up to evidence—eh?"

Those eyes spoke far more plainly than his tongue did, and Doctor Danger knew that his fears were only too well-founded.

"You have made up your mind to arrest Martin Bridgewater, then?"

"I certainly have, old friend."

"But even you can't really think he'd commit such an atrocious crime as this, man alive!"

"That's easier said than answered, one way or the other, Dangerfield, but this much I'll add: I'm justified in arresting Martin Bridgewater, if for nothing more than to question him concerning his call here last night."

"If he *did* call, that is!"

"I think we have proof to that effect, doctor."

"Nothing better than the half-crazed maunderings of a poor fellow who has not had time to rally from the awful shock of finding his dearly beloved master weltering in blood! And even then Quayle refused to identify the man by more than a portion of his garments."

"I've known a far smaller clue to pave the way to the gallows, though," grimly commented the officer of the law.

Silence reigned for the space of a minute, during which time Doctor Danger was staring moodily at the floor, his sinewy hands feeling of each other with a nervousness far from usual with him. And when he spoke again, he was still staring, still twisting his hands, without once looking up to meet those keen yet kindly eyes taking silent notes.

"This cuts me deep, Gowdy—cuts me deep and sore, as you ought to be able to guess. I'm an old friend of—of the family, and that's one reason why I can measure the blow better than *you* can, perhaps. It will crush—You're making it a doubly-heavy blow for a good woman, man!"

The last words came in a tone of almost fierce anger, but Chief Gowdy coolly answered:

"'Twould be a mighty good riddance to her, if only the husband was concerned, Dangerfield, and no man ought to know that better *than you*! Martin Bridgewater was born a cur, and has kept on growing no better ever since, until now—but you've been out of town so long, Harlow, that you don't realize just how infernally mean the fellow *has* grown!"

"But not wicked enough to commit such a horrible deed as this!"

"I wouldn't back that up with an oath, Dangerfield. I tell you, man, Bridgewater has gone to the bad until I wouldn't trust him—"

Doctor Danger checked that too impulsive speech by a quick gesture, then spoke in lower, more rapid tones, that and his face as

well betraying what a deep interest he was feeling in this tragedy.

"Still, old friend, she is his wife, the only living child of poor Gordon. Even if her home-life was perfectly happy, this blow must fall with crushing force, but if it is coupled with the knowledge that her—that Martin Bridgewater has been arrested for that killing?"

"I'm sincerely sorry for the woman, Dangerfield, but what can I do? You know for yourself that I'd not stand justified in overlooking this fact?"

"If it is a fact, Gowdy."

"It surely is, one way or the other, and there's only one way of getting at that: to arrest Martin Bridgewater just as quickly as he can be come up with. And that's what I'm going to do, too!"

"You haven't sent to the house, then, as yet?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Then let me go there first, Gowdy," earnestly asked the surgeon, hand on arm and eye meeting eye. "Give me one hour's grace, man! Let me have that length of time in which to break this awful blow to Mrs. —to Darius Gordon's daughter! I ask it for old friendship's sake, Gowdy!"

There was a brief pause, during which the chief of police seemed trying to read what might be lying back of those brown orbs; but he saw nothing worse than friendly anxiety, and then made answer:

"If I grant you an hour's start, Dangerfield, you'll not try to run that fellow off in case he comes in your way?"

"You mean Bridgewater?"

"Who else would I mean, then? If he should chance to be at the house when you get there, you'll detain him for me?"

"Or keep him company until you can interview him in person or by deputy, yes!" firmly replied the surgeon. "If I could think him really guilty, I'm not so sure I'd say as much, but—"

"Some one did the killing, Harlow, and, confidentially, I don't know an individual I'd feel less compunction about sending to the gallows for that ugly deed than—you comprehend?"

Doctor Danger shivered a bit, and his eyes were averted, but not for long. Coming back, he spoke in changed tones:

"About this house, chief; are you going to keep it under guard?"

"For the present, yes. Why do you ask?"

"And the—the body?"

"I haven't quite decided, as yet, but in all probability I'll turn it over to an undertaker for present keeping. Once more, why ask?"

"Will you give word to your men on duty to admit me, when I come back here, chief? I'd like to take a closer look at things, when I have more leisure time. Will you do this?"

"You have an object in asking this pass, Dangerfield, but I'll not crowd you too closely, just now," slowly said Gowdy, but at the same time scribbling a few words with a pencil on one of his cards.

"I'll explain my meaning to you later on, Gowdy, but for now—many thanks, old friend!" as he glanced at the card, which bade all concerned to pass Doctor Dangerfield where and when he saw fit to go.

"That meets your views, then?"

"Perfectly! And if you should be here when I get back, Gowdy, I'll tell you my reasons for asking such a favor."

"If not here, I'll see you again before long, old friend, and then can listen to your explanation. Just now—well, your hour of grace ought to begin at once, old man!"

A touch of grimness entered those tones, and Doctor Danger was shrewd enough to see that he must not press official good nature too hardly all at once. There is a limit to friendship, and he was drawing dangerously nigh that boundary by squandering so many valuable minutes.

"All right, chief; in an hour from now you can come or send to the house, if you haven't found Bridgewater elsewhere."

Doctor Danger turned about and quickly entered the building, passing through to the room where Emory Fitch was still waiting with what patience he could muster, although his wrinkled brows told how nearly that little stock was exhausted.

"He went into the other room," explained the young man, as those brown eyes flashed around in quest of Roger Quayle. "Elder

went with him, but—I'm growing terribly tired of all this, sir!"

"Then we'll get a hustle on, just for a change, Little Corporal," declared the surgeon, with forced lightness of tone and manner. "If Luke Elder has taken charge, the poor fellow is in fairly good hands, so—come with me, my lad!"

With alacrity this request was complied with, and in less than another minute the two men were clear of the building, striding rapidly toward the more thickly settled portion of the city.

As might have been expected from his being barred from the death-chamber and the examination which surely had taken place, young Fitch had any number of questions which he fairly burned to put; but almost before he could begin along that line, Doctor Danger put on the brake.

"I'll tell you all later on, lad, but for now—You say your cousin is an intimate friend of Mrs. Bridgewater?"

"She is just that, sir!"

"Good! Show me the shortest way to where you're living, Emory, for there's much important work to be done, and mighty little time for its execution, too!"

By this time the two men had passed out of sight of the Gordon residence, and at a cross-street some little distance ahead, they caught sight of a closed hack slowly moving along.

A clear, ringing call reached the driver, and his prompt response told them he had no objection to taking up a fare.

"Give him the address, Fitch, and tell him to keep his nags from going to sleep by the way," muttered Doctor Danger, as they reached the vehicle, which he entered first.

Emory obeyed, and the hack started off briskly enough to please even the impatient surgeon, who gave vent to a long breath of relief as he glanced at the dial of his watch.

"Reckon there's any danger of our not finding your cousin at home, Corporal?" was his next troubling doubt. "Is she at all likely to be out at this hour of the day, think?"

"I'm pretty certain we'll find Lorita at home, sir. May I ask what you wish her to undertake, though?"

"Can't you see it, boy?" with a feverish irritability foreign to his usual disposition.

"Mrs. Bridgewater will sorely need a woman friend in an emergency like this, and who can better break the awful news than one whom she is accustomed to confide in?"

"Lorita will go, of course, but—it's a sore task for her, as well as her friend!" muttered the young man, his manner plainly betraying his secret, although Doctor Danger was too much troubled just then to pay much attention.

"It's bad enough, the death of a father after such a horrible manner," muttered the surgeon, shifting uneasily on his seat the while; "but when coupled—or followed—by seeming proof that a husband—"

"What?" ejaculated Fitch, excitedly, as he caught that meaning. "You surely can't mean that Bridgewater killed Gordon?"

"I don't believe it, but others are talking that way, and now you can understand why I'm in such a hurry to get a true and trusted friend to Mrs. Bridgewater, before an officer of the law can—How much further have we to drive, Fitch?" breaking off abruptly as the hack swung deftly around the corner.

"We're almost home, now, sir," answered the young man.

So true was this statement, that in less than three more minutes, Doctor Danger was being warmly greeted by Mrs. Fitch, while Emory was hurrying his fair cousin into her wraps for the drive to her friend.

CHAPTER X.

DOCTOR DANGER TAKES CHARGE.

A GREAT deal can be accomplished in the short space of five minutes, when all hands are thoroughly in earnest, and at the expiration of that period, Lorita Mason was ready to leave the house in their company, and Mrs. Fitch had gathered a tolerably accurate idea of the emergency which demanded such hasty action.

On his part, Emory Fitch had broken the news to his fair cousin, as her frightened eyes and unusually pale face proclaimed

even before they crossed the threshold, and so Doctor Danger found the way at least partially paved for him when the hack once more got under way.

Fitch introduced the couple, and the surgeon retained the little hand which had come forth in answer to his own palm. He pressed it assuringly as he began to speak, lifting his voice just high enough to make his words audible above the rumbling of wheels.

He told Lorita of the tragedy, and said something anent the awful force with which that blow must fall upon the poor daughter's head, unless the warm sympathy of her best and nearest friends could do something toward softening that stroke.

"We'll do our level best to help you out, Miss Mason, of course, but a woman can do so much more than a man, in a case like this. You agree with me, I hope?"

"I think I understand you, sir," came the slightly husky answer. "I will do all that I can, of course, but you—surely 'twill be no little consolation to dear Marian when she hears that you, an old and true friend, are near at hand to lend both comfort and aid."

Dim though the light was there in the closed carriage, it proved quite sufficient to reveal the flush which leaped into that bronzed face at this speech.

Doctor Danger knew now that Lorita Mason was not wholly ignorant of that past leaf in his life history, turned over and closely sealed though he deemed it!

Lorita seemed to gain in courage just as the surgeon apparently lost it, for when Doctor Danger shrunk back, with averted face, her little hand clasped his more tightly, and her voice sounded clearer as she said:

"You surely will not mistake my meaning, doctor, when I say that in such a dreadfully shocking affair as this, a man is better fitted to offer consolation and lend strength to bear up under the blow. And you—oh, I'm so glad you're at hand in this awful trouble for poor Marian!"

The inevitable touch of hysterics came to the surface now, but not until the young lady had made her meaning clear, though after a womanly fashion.

Harlow Dangerfield turned very pale as he listened, but his flinching had come to an end, now that he knew what to expect.

He had already been aware that Emory Fitch knew, or at least strongly suspected, the close ties which had, years ago, bound Marian Gordon and himself together; and since this young woman was a relative, and almost surely in a fair way to become a still nearer connection of the Fitch family, it was not so strange that she, also, should know something concerning that black and bitter past.

Still, this line of reasoning hardly lessened the pain which any such allusion was in nature bound to give the surgeon, and his face was unnaturally pale, his tongue unusually husky as he made reply at last:

"Whether you can guess them or not, Miss Mason, there are powerful reasons why I ought to decline taking such a position, and do decline, unless it becomes absolutely necessary—for her sake—for me to act otherwise."

"I know. I comprehend. But—I still think—"

"Knowing so much, you also know why I shrink from such an ordeal, Miss Mason," agitatedly cut in the surgeon. "Still, I'll be close at hand if really needed, and will promptly answer your summons."

Having come to an understanding thus far, Doctor Danger went on to tell of the tragedy, so far as he had learned the facts, deeming it wisest to task the maiden thus far, in order to the better prepare her for the task of consolator.

"It sounds brutal, almost cowardly, in me, telling you all this, my dear child," he said, in conclusion, when Emory Fitch spoke of their nearing their present destination. "But if you hear the very worst now, you will be all the better able to answer her questions, and will have rallied sufficiently to think only of her, and her needs, don't you see?"

"I see that you've thoughts only for Mrs. Bridgewater, and none at all for—well, isn't it so, Lorita?"

Luckily, perhaps, the hack just then drew up to the curb in front of a spacious, stately residence, and Doctor Danger opened the door before the driver could leave his seat,

and giving Lorita a helping hand, he curtly spoke to young Fitch:

"Pay the hackman, and let him go his way, Corporal. We'll hardly require his services again, and if Bridge— Look to it, will you, son?"

Doctor Danger broke off abruptly, leaving his sentence incomplete, helping Lorita across the flags and up the stone steps to the front door, where he quickly pulled the bell.

This was promptly answered, and with a hasty word to the servant, who plainly was well accustomed to her calls, Lorita entered first and like one knowing full well where the house-mistress was to be found at that particular hour, ran lightly up the broad flight of stairs.

Doctor Danger did not offer to cross the threshold until Emory Fitch came from discharging the hackman, but then he silently passed through the wide entry to a half-darkened parlor, where the servant left them together.

Pale, his jaws sternly set, Doctor Danger sprung up from the chair which he had taken while under the servant's eyes, and turning his back squarely upon the "Little Corporal," he stared vacantly at one of the paintings hanging from the wall.

He saw without seeing, however, and that picture might have been a blank for all that Harlow Dangerfield could recall, afterward.

The past was coming up before him, and his heart was turning as sick as his face was pale, over those bitter-sweet memories.

"Time was—but now!"

Ah, the bitter contrast!

Only a few years gone by, according to the usual computation of time. So brief a period, yet what a tremendous change in all else!

"And all *his* work!" broke involuntarily from those pain-and-anger-blanced lips, a clinched fist smiting the air as though it might have been the sneeringly handsome visage of the being so fiercely denounced. "All *your* work, you, lying, treacherous devil!"

Emory Fitch gave a slight stir, feeling like a guilty eavesdropper, and catching that sound, Doctor Danger realized how far beyond prudence those torturing memories were carrying him, and huskily muttering:

"Forget it, boy! I didn't think—I never knew my thoughts were coming out, like—*Forget it, Corporal!*"

With a desperate effort at self-control, Doctor Dangerfield seated himself, his face looking cold and hard in its forced composure, but that very rigidity betrayed to young Fitch the tremendous strain that man was putting upon himself in order to at least mask his emotions.

Bit by bit a said romance of the past was coming back to the memory of the young man, many of the fragments which were so neatly fitting in with others, never having been recalled since heard so unthinkingly, long ago, but now given fresh life by Doctor Danger himself.

And then, imperfect though his knowledge surely was, Emory Fitch began to understand why this man should hate and curse that other.

A query from the younger man had elicited the fact from the servant that Mrs. Bridgewater was at home, and now they both began to wonder why nothing was heard from or seen of Lorita Mason.

In fact, hardly ten minutes had elapsed since their entrance, but the time seemed thrice that long, and despite his forced composure, Doctor Danger was beginning to fidget uneasily in his seat, when, shrill and blood-curdling, a woman's shriek rung throughout that building!

"Merciful heavens!" hoarsely cried Dangerfield, springing across to the door. "It's killed her!"

A second stride carried him into the hall, another great leap took him to the foot of the staircase, up which the surgeon bounded, several lifts at a time.

Swiftly as he moved, Doctor Danger had only reached the first landing, when the pale, scared face of Lorita Mason was revealed at the next turn, and from her lips came the cry:

"Hurry, doctor! I'm afraid—hasten, for love of heaven!"

Even as she spoke, the maiden turned and fled with wonderful swiftness, but more

than the fire of youth had come to the surgeon, and bounding up the remainder of the stairs, he was in time to glimpse those skirts as they whipped through a chamber door, beyond.

With this to guide him, Doctor Danger was quickly on the spot, giving a sharp, gasping cry as he saw that fair woman lying in the middle of the spacious apartment, pale as a corpse, an expression of horror fixed upon her face.

Only that one cry, then the man was forgotten in the physician, and quickly, tenderly lifting the unconscious woman in his arms, Dangerfield carried her across to the white-canopied bed which stood in a corner of the room.

Placing her upon this, he first made sure that he had nothing more dangerous than a swoon to contend with, then fell to work over her as he might over a patient then seen for the first time.

"She's not—*do* say poor Marian is not—*not dead!*" pantingly begged the frightened maiden, then springing to the door of the chamber, where Emory Fitch just then showed himself. "Oh, Emory! If only—"

"Mrs. Bridgewater is far from being dead, child," gravely said the surgeon, but frowning darkly as he looked that way, to note the young man's coming. "She has merely swooned, and will rally in a few moments. Before she does that—well, Corporal, don't you reckon you can find something to occupy your attention below stairs for a few minutes?"

Abashed by this blunt hint, yet immensely relieved at learning that no actual danger menaced Mrs. Bridgewater, Fitch gave Lorita a reassuring look, then beat a retreat.

Doctor Danger was about to call on the maiden to assist him, when his fair patient suddenly rallied, lifting her head to stare dazedly around the chamber, huskily gasping the words:

"Where is he? Don't let—arrest him! He killed—oh!"

"Everything shall come to pass precisely as you would have it, madam," said the surgeon, speaking with forced calmness, although his pulses were bounding at a rapid rate, and his face was ghastly pale just then.

"Where is he? Martin—arrest—assassin!" once more gasped the wife, brushing a trembling hand across her eyes, then again staring about her, to give another violent start as she noticed the masculine form so close by her side.

At the same time, with a half-scared expression coming into his pale face, Doctor Danger slipped a hand over those incoherent lips, to cut short possible speech which might later on be deeply regretted.

"Be calm, I pray you, Marian," he said, hoarsely, and thus unwittingly made that growing recognition complete, for Mrs. Bridgewater shrank tremblingly away from his touch, gasping forth the words:

"No—don't touch! I'm not fit! *I killed him—father—pardon!*"

With that her strength suddenly failed her, and with another wailing shriek, the woman fell back in a deathlike swoon.

CHAPTER XI.

A DETECTIVE ON THE SCENT.

SERIOUSLY disturbed though he was, Dr. Dangerfield felt better able to cope with physical than mental trouble, just then, and though his medical practice had been almost entirely confined to the army, with men for patients, yet he had not entirely lacked feminine experience while in garrison.

This was not the first swoon by many which he had handled, and once more he forgot the man in the healer.

A few words reassured Lorita Mason, who thereafter proved herself an able coadjutor, and ere long Mrs. Bridgewater was in a fair way for recovering her lost senses.

"'Tis almost a pity, too!" gloomily muttered the surgeon, quite as much to himself as to his fair assistant. "Almost better death than such an awakening!"

"I thought it was death, too, when I ran to call you, first," declared Miss Mason, with a shiver. "That shriek—and then she fell so like one stricken by—ugh!"

"You told her—what?"

"About her father—poor soul!"

"And not—nothing more?"

"Enough, too!" with a touch of indignation in her tones as she flashed a look up into his face; a face that turned even more ghastly in its pallor at those words.

If Lorita had not mentioned aught about the suspicions cast toward Martin Bridgewater, why those wild, disconnected words? For surely they pointed toward her husband as the slayer!

Just then there came a sharp summons at the front door, which was caught by the keen sense of hearing with which Doctor Danger was gifted, and with a sudden conviction of the truth, he glanced at his watch, then hurriedly spoke to Miss Mason:

"Stay here and care for Mrs. Bridgewater. I must go down—*she* must not hear what those fellows want, at least right now!"

If he hoped to stand as a complete shield between the woman he had and still loved so passionately, and still further trouble, Doctor Danger knew he must lose no further time in explanations.

Taken all in all, Lorita had proved her capability, and trusting the rest to her womanly intuition, the surgeon sprung out of the chamber and to the head of the broad flight, reaching that just as the servant opened the door in answer to that peremptory summons.

It was too late to actually bar the entrance, but Emory Fitch was likewise hurrying to the front, and then Doctor Danger reached the lower landing in time to answer the blunt query of Detective Brown.

"Bridgewater is not at home, sir, as I can add my testimony," he gravely declared, in addition to the denial given by the half-frightened, half-puzzled servant.

Back of the detective, yet standing so as to act as might be called upon, were two other men, and while they were dressed in private clothing, it was an easy matter to decide that they were part of the police force.

Brown gave a little nod in recognition of the doctor, but his broad, massive face seemed to square itself yet a little more, and his tones grew deeper as he asked:

"The mistress has not gone with the master, has she? I'll just step inside, while you call her, my friend."

He suited actions to word, crossing the threshold, while his two men moved forward as though they deemed it proper to closely imitate his actions in all respects.

"Bid your fellows wait where they are, sir," sternly said Dangerfield, at the same time pushing the heavy door to. "As for your seeing the lady of the house, I forbid any such intrusion—"

"You do?"

"As the physician in charge, I do, Mr. Brown," curtly retorted the surgeon. "Mrs. Bridgewater is physically unable to see strangers, no matter how much may be depending upon such an interview."

The detective seemed taken aback a bit by this bold front, which was an obstacle he had hardly calculated upon while laying his plans of procedure; but there was a spice of the true bull-dog in his mental as well as physical make-up, and instead of shaking his determination to see the lady of the house, this opposition only strengthened it.

"Of course I'd hate to mix up in a row, sir, just now, and just here," he said, with almost insolent deliberation, his small but unusually keen eyes running up and down that sinewy figure, as though measuring its actual powers of resistance.

"There is no need of a row, sir," coldly asserted the surgeon. "If you have any business here at all, 'tis confined to Mr. Bridgewater in person, not to his—family."

"You say Bridgewater is not at home—"

"I repeat it: he is *not* at home."

"Perhaps you can tell me where he *is*, then?"

Doctor Danger shook his head, color beginning to come back to his face, and a danger-light to deepen in his brown eyes. Whether he knew it or not, Detective Brown was drawing perilously near to the "row" he disclaimed, just then.

"There you have it, then," declared the officer, with a dogged nod of his head. "I have good and sufficient reasons for wishing to find Martin Bridgewater with as little loss of time as may be, and since you say he

is not here, at home, while you don't know where he may be, what comes next? Mrs. Bridgewater, his wife—

"Is here, sir!"

Doctor Danger gave a short, half-smothered exclamation as those tones came to his ears, and looking back, he caught sight of an almost ghastly pale countenance above the first landing.

Detective Brown was much less taken aback, and giving an off-hand salute, but leaving his hat still in place, spoke up in turn:

"Mrs. Bridgewater, is it not?"

"That is my name," answered the woman, with a faint tinge of color coming to her cheeks as the surgeon sprung up the steps to lend her a helping hand.

"You are not fit to face the fellow Mar—madam," Doctor Danger huskily muttered. "Go back to your room, with your friend, and let me get shut of him—*please!*"

Whether the detective caught aught of these low words, he evidently gave a shrewd guess as to the full meaning of that action, for he quickly spoke again:

"A question or two, first, madam. Your husband: he is not at home?"

"Mr. Bridgewater is not at home," answered the woman, gently but firmly rejecting that offered arm, then passing down a broad flight to the level on which the detective now stood.

"Can you tell me where I'd be most likely to find him then?"

Mrs. Bridgewater shook her head, slowly. The color faded out of her cheeks again, but otherwise she betrayed no signs of returning weakness.

"Your husband was here—when?"

"Last evening, sir. He remained only for a few minutes, then—he went away again, just at dusk."

There was a bit of a break in this answer, which the detective was swift to note, giving it his own interpretation, of course.

"At dusk, you say? Did he mention where he was going, madam?"

There was a brief pause here, and while Mrs. Bridgewater placed one white hand upon the newel-post, its mate rose to her throat, as though she found difficulty in speaking, or in breathing.

Doctor Danger saw this, and stepped forward to interfere again, but before he could fairly do this, the answer came, slowly, but with almost painful distinctness:

"I have reason to believe he was going to call on—to see my poor father, sir!"

"Marian—Mrs. Bridgewater!" ejaculated Doctor Danger, fairly startled out of his enforced quietude at last. "You ought not to—"

"Quiet, sir!" sternly cut in Detective Brown, then adding, in more persuasive tones: "And those reasons, ma'am, were just what?"

"Words Mr. Bridgewater spoke. He was very angry with me, and seemed even more enraged against my father. He said—I remember his words distinctly—'He's an infernal old crank! You've been brewing trouble between us, but I'll make him listen to reason, or I'll send him to Tophet!'"

The woman's voice faltered at those last words, yet seemed to grow hysterical, and fearing lest another and even worse collapse might follow such unnatural excitement, Doctor Danger again interposed, lending Mrs. Bridgewater support, and begging her to be calm.

"Say no more, I beg of you, until you have time to fully comprehend this unfortunate situation," he urged, earnestly, gravely. "Don't answer questions, for he nor any other man, has a right to extort such—"

Mrs. Bridgewater forced a wan smile, then said in oddly calm tones for one in her situation:

"I have nothing to hide, gentlemen. Why should I not answer? My father has been murdered, they tell me! And I—I have nothing to live for now, save to avenge his awful death!"

"In which sad duty I'll lend you—all honest men will lend you aid as well as sympathy," huskily said the surgeon, manfully striving to keep his own powerful feelings under cover, but with poor success for a man of his (ordinarily) iron will. "But you surely can't think—"

"That Martin Bridgewater is the assassin?"

supplemented the woman, with another of those strange smiles briefly lighting up the dull gray pallor of her face. "I have nothing to say as to that, save this: let Martin Bridgewater prove that my poor father was alive and well when their interview of last night came to an end! If he can do *this*, then he has naught to fear from the truth. If he fails—who was it once said: "*Let no guilty man escape!*"

Without waiting for reply or comment, Marian Bridgewater turned away, taking the ready arm of Lorita Mason, then reascended the stairs, passing beyond their range of vision in the direction of her chamber.

Doctor Danger was taken all aback by this, so widely different from anything he had known in the Marian Gordon of happier days; but Detective Brown grinned broadly, and gave a fairly well satisfied nod of his bullet-head after those vanished shapes.

"A dandy, *she* is, for a fact! And that is your *sick* woman, doctor?"

Doctor Danger felt powerfully tempted to answer that really good-humored sneer with his clinched fist, but prudence forbade. Better make a friendly use of this fellow, than to turn him into an actual enemy.

"You are going, then?" he asked, as Brown touched the door-knob.

"Yes. My man is clearly not here, and that says look elsewhere. You remain, I suppose?"

Doctor Danger was doing some very rapid thinking, just then, and before the heavy door was fairly swung open, his present determination was taken.

"No, I'll go as far as—one moment, please," he said, then turning to Emory Fitch, speaking swiftly; "You remain, lad, to act or serve. Send a servant for the family physician, to guard against emergencies, and—but your good sense will guide you rightly enough, I reckon!"

Without waiting for answer or questions, Doctor Danger sprang outside, to join the detective; who was just giving his men their final instructions. They were left behind to guard the Bridgewater residence.

"In case the game should double back, you know," chuckled Brown.

CHAPTER XII.

DOCTOR DANGER'S NEW THEORY.

"THEN you really think there is cause for suspecting Martin Bridgewater?" asked the surgeon, after they had turned the corner nearest that residence, and were striding briskly along.

"Well, didn't those words sort of point in that direction?" drawlingly asked the detective, his lids nearly closed as he looked keenly into that pale, grave countenance at his side.

"The poor woman had just passed through two profound fainting-fits, sir, and though you may not be a physician, still you ought to know that one is hardly accountable for every word spoken under such circumstances."

"Well, discount it just one-half, and the remainder is quite sufficient to point out my next move," came the quick rejoinder.

"And that move is?"

"To find Martin Bridgewater with as little loss of time as may be, of course!"

"Then you really think—"

"I think that Bridgewater has had trouble with both his wife and his father-in-law. Query: Was that quarrel serious enough to justify killing?"

Despite his nerve, Harlow Dangerfield could not entirely check the cold shiver which ran over his frame as he listened to those words, so coldly, so significantly spoken.

For some little time neither man spoke after this, and when that silence was broken, it was merely a brief question:

"Where are you going first, Mr. Brown?"

"First to the Central. I promised to report immediately to the chief, and I reckon he's got back to his office by this."

As Doctor Danger had likewise determined to call upon Septimus Gowdy without unnecessary delay, he again lapsed into silence, keeping pace with the sturdy detective, who seemed to prefer his own legs as a method of speedy locomotion.

Although several years had passed since

Dangerfield last walked the streets of St. Louis, he found no bewildering change had been worked by time, so far as the older portion of the city was concerned.

Although business had never brought him much in contact with the police force, or its surroundings, he had frequently passed by the grim-fronted building which was locally known as "the Central," and ere long he began to recognize its neighborhood.

Once at the building, Doctor Danger fell to the rear, leaving Brown to reach the chief in advance, and keeping apart from the officials in that gloomy room until after the detective reappeared, passing briskly through the place and taking his departure, apparently without seeing or at least recognizing his recent companion.

Still, this exactly suited the surgeon, just then, and waiting until it was certain the detective was not retracing his steps for aught forgotten, Doctor Danger produced the card given him by his old friend, and glanced at the penciled words to make sure he had the right card.

"Pass bearer anywhere, at any time," ran the order, followed by the oddly arranged signature of the chief.

Asking for Gowdy, and showing this card to the officer on duty, the doctor was immediately conducted to the inner room where the chief of police could be reached only by those whom he himself wished to see.

Doctor Danger met with a cordial welcome, and now he could see that official honors had wrought no great alteration in his friend of other years; and Septimus Gowdy seemed more inclined to recall those past days than to dwell upon the gloomy chance which had that day brought them together.

"Let it drop, man!" he said, as the door closed behind the policeman and they were left sole occupants of that neatly appointed apartment. "I often tire of the harness, and now—do you remember—"

Doctor Danger forced a smile, but through it his real anxiety shone, and he cut the chief short, by saying:

"Another time, Gowdy, but now—I can think and talk of nothing save this black mystery!"

"As you will, old fellow," gravely answered the chief. "You didn't find Bridgewater at home, then?"

"No. Brown told you the rest, of course?"

"Yes. He seems to think—but you came here with him, didn't you?"

"I did, but I'm far from sharing his evident belief that Martin Bridgewater had part or lot in the murder."

"Accident, or suicide," added Gowdy, with a faint smile.

"I think it will prove to be what I called it sir," almost doggedly persisted the surgeon, "but before I say anything further on that point, may I ask just how far you have gone?"

"In what direction, Harlow?"

"I mean what steps have you taken, apart from sending Brown to look for Bridgewater?"

"For one thing, I've taken the liberty of turning the body over to an undertaking firm, to be embalmed and otherwise cared for, until his daughter, Mrs. Bridgewater, puts in a claim for it."

"I thank you in her name for all that," said Dangerfield, his voice turned husky through powerful emotion, which he took no stern measures to conceal now he was alone with an old and trusted friend. "The poor child bore up marvelously well under the awful shock, but I sadly fear she will have to pay all the heavier penalty when reaction fairly comes."

"But not so terrible a price as might be if she idolized the man whom she—all right, Harlow!" breaking off in obedience to that almost fierce gesture.

"I see that your man Brown has told you all that happened at the house," said the surgeon, forcing his voice under control once more. "I told him then, as I tell you now, it is worse than shameful to make use of words uttered under such circumstances!"

"Even if they really point toward the criminal?"

"I'll never think that way, Gowdy—never!"

"Yet some one is surely guilty, or else

your firm belief in this being a murder case must be abandoned, old man," half jestingly spoke the chief of police.

"I know that, Gowdy, but I firmly believe Martin Bridgewater is innocent of this crime, guilty though he may be in other respects."

"You have some actual *reason* for such a positive belief, Harlow?" half-asked, half-asserted the chief, keenly scanning that earnest face. "What is it, man?"

"I have a reason, and to let you judge of that new theory is my main excuse for coming here now," declared the surgeon, then giving a brief but clear detail of the rifled safe at the down-town office of the wealthy stock-broker.

"Luke Elder, Gordon's confidential clerk, declared that no person save himself and his employer knew the safe combination. If the safe had been opened by force, some signs surely must have been left. You are ready to admit so much, of course?"

"Of course. Then you think that Gordon removed the package, after the office was closed and left for the night as usual?"

"That is precisely what I *do* think, yes!"

"Why would he take such an unusual step, though?"

"I think I can explain even that to your satisfaction, Gowdy; but first, don't you think the tragedy *might* have happened in this way? For instance, if any one saw or suspected Gordon's removing a package of such large value, then dogged him to his home?"

"Was there anything in the shape or nature of this package to tell a stranger how valuable it might be, though?"

"Nothing particular, but—"

"And another point: Why should Gordon take so much trouble as you are trying to make appear? Surely the package, no matter how valuable it might be, would be safer in his big office safe, than on his person, or stowed away in any hiding-place such as his home could offer?"

During this deliberate speech, Doctor Danger was fidgeting uneasily in his chair, but when the chief finished, his determination was taken, and he began the same narrative of border adventure with which he had that morning regaled the ears of Emory Fitch.

Septimus Gowdy listened in silence, his high forehead deeply wrinkled during the first portion of the account, for he was vainly trying to connect those two seemingly foreign points; but then, as Doctor Danger grew nearer the present, and spoke of the fierce assault made upon him so quickly after his arrival in the "Windy City," he broke forth with:

"By the Lord! that looks as though you had been dogged clean from the Texas border, Dangerfield! And—a woman, was it?"

"A woman, almost beyond a doubt," gloomily answered the surgeon, then adding, by way of further explanation. "Of course I was taken all aback, *then*, but since I've had more time to think it over, this is my conclusion."

"The smuggler, Vincente Gayferos, had a wife—some said purely Spanish, belonging to a rich and blue-blooded race, others declaring her of mixed blood, with the Indian predominating. I now believe *she* has sworn a vendetta against me, and is after my life, even more than the treasure we took from her husband!"

"And you think she may have followed you from Chicago?"

For answer, Doctor Danger told of his second adventure with an armed and thoroughly desperate assassin, showing his perforated garments by way of additional proof. Then he added:

"My trunk went astray, and has not turned up as yet, which is my apology for still wearing these garments. I did intend calling at the depot for it this morning, but—Well, it can wait a little longer."

Chief Gowdy exhibited a strong interest in this narrative, and inspected the perforated linen closely, finally drawing back with a long, low whistle which might mean much or mean little for all his face betrayed.

"And you told Gordon all this, of course?" he asked, presently.

"Not all. Simply that I had fair reasons for thinking I was being shadowed by ene-

mies, who might attempt to get away with the package; and as the contents belonged to another than myself, I would feel safer if he took it in charge for the night."

"Which he did, of course. Why didn't he ask you home with him?"

Doctor Danger flushed hotly at this blunt question, but passed it by with an evasive answer. He had been in haste, and Gordon seemed not a little out of sorts about some business matter; at least, such was the interpretation he had placed upon the few words spoken to Luke Elder by the stock-broker.

"Now, chief, this is the theory I've at least partly formed," added the doctor.

"Might it not be that Gordon, having for some good reason returned to the office at an hour later than customary, fancied the package would be safer under his immediate charge? Might he not have opened the safe, taken the package and returned home with it?"

"Then, too, is it not even more than probable that some one—the woman who twice attempted my life, as I firmly believe mainly on account of that same parcel, or else an ordinary criminal, who suspected its value—followed Gordon home, and ended by killing him for that same package of bank-notes and diamonds?"

"It *may* be as you reason, Dangerfield," admitted Chief Gowdy.

"If so, and I begin to still more firmly believe this theory is the correct one, it ought not to be a difficult task to trace the crime."

"In just what way, doctor?"

CHAPTER XIII.

DOCTOR DANGER'S SKELETON.

"FOR one thing, the bills were of large denomination, and almost without exception perfectly new and clean."

"Did you take the numbers?" asked Gowdy, with an air of surprise.

Doctor Danger shook his head, with a faint smile.

"America is not over the water, chief, and their methods are not ours. No, I did not take down the numbers, but I can still swear to what *ought* to be of importance if, as it may be, Darius Gordon came by his death because of the money contained in that parcel."

"There were sixty bills in that parcel, fifty for one hundred dollars each, and the other ten being five hundred dollar notes."

"Not to be found in every man's pocket, I'll admit, particularly the larger figure; still, 'twould hardly serve to arrest on suspicion of murder, each and every man who was so lucky," drily commented Gowdy.

Doctor Danger smiled in his turn, but leaning a bit nearer his old friend, once again parted the front of both coat and vest, gently tapping that triangular hole in his stiffly starched linen, the mark being all the more easily traced thanks to its edging of dried blood.

"You overlook this, I fancy, chief," he said, to point his meaning.

"It's where your friends of the down train stabbed you, of course?"

"Of course. I told you I believed my life was saved by the plunder which led up to the assault being made, didn't I?"

Chief Gowdy nodded assent, and his face began to show an inkling of the truth, at last.

"You mean—did the blade pass through that parcel, then?"

"It surely *did*. I thought I told you as much?"

"If you had told me, would I be floundering in the brush like this, old man?" exploded the official, with a touch of irritation showing itself. "And so—let me look again, Harlow."

Catching a coat-lapel the chief turned his friend slightly, in order to let the light from the window fall more directly upon that cut linen, then gave the red-edged spot close attention.

"The aim was true enough, as you can see for yourself," added the surgeon, while this inspection was going on. "Even after passing through all obstacles, the steel bit deep enough to leave me a stinging reminder of my unknown friend. And—with just such another three-cornered hole through each one of those bank notes—eh, Gowdy?"

"You opened the parcel after the blow, then?"

"Yes. For one thing, the hole was plenty large enough to let a diamond or two slip through, in case their envelope had also been cut, and I was cool enough to wish to guard against any misfortune of that sort."

"And then—well, I had an odd fancy to look over what had almost certainly saved my precious life, you know," winding up with a short, half-bitter laugh.

"And the money was all marked, like *this*?" asked the chief, giving the edged mark a parting touch, then lifting his eyes to the face opposite. "Blood and all?"

"Only a little less pronounced," confirmed the surgeon. "Of course the paper didn't take up the blood so quickly, and then I smoothed out the holes cut by the dirk. Still, both can be seen, readily enough, when looked for."

"Any other point you recall, Dangerfield?"

"One other, yes. I made up the parcel, myself, and was careful to lay each bill in place as I counted the amount. The notes were all facing the same way, and I noticed that the hole was something more than an inch from the right-hand end of the bills, when you looked at their face, and that the blade had entered their backs, first."

"You are *sure* of that, even?" asked Gowdy, with his shaggy brows going up in surprise.

"Each note carries its own proof, chief," quietly asserted the surgeon. "Although I smoothed out the marks as well as I could, the little ring of blood which soaked in at the cut before I removed the packet, tells plainly enough which side of the parcel was next my breast."

"You're right, old man!" exclaimed the official, with a gleaming of his eyes as he nodded that way while reaching for pen and paper at his desk. "You'd ought to have turned detective long ago, Dangerfield!"

Writing rapidly for a minute or more, Chief Gowdy passed the paper over to his friend, bidding him see if all was correct.

It was a terse but thorough description of the dagger-marked bills, just as Doctor Dangerfield had detailed, and that admission was quickly given by the surgeon.

"All right, so far, then," said the chief, taking back the paper and placing it under a glass weight for the time being. "If the bills are like this—new, of large figures, and each one so distinctly marked—no ordinary thief would run the risk of putting them afloat so near the scene of the crime, supposing your theory of it all is correct."

"I'm giving it stronger faith the more I think it over, Gowdy."

"Naturally enough, but bare belief is hardly evidence to hang a man on," bluntly commented the other. "Still, it *may* be even so, and I'll see that this description is passed around without loss of time. With the force on the alert, and banks and larger establishments warned, if any one should shove off such a note, he, she, or they, will certainly be known in the end."

Once more Doctor Danger warmly thanked the chief for his readiness to accept and act upon suggestions, then asked:

"What do you think of my theory, anyway, old friend?"

Gowdy returned that look with one of quizzical dubiety, then slowly made answer by asking another question:

"How is your temper this afternoon, Dangerfield?"

"You mean—what?"

"Well, do you want a bald-headed answer, or must I give it a sugar-coating?"

"The plain truth, of course," declared the surgeon, but frowning a bit as he saw whither this drift tended. "What is your opinion? How did poor Gordon come by his death?"

"My opinion is like yours, Dangerfield, merely that of one man, and that a man who is liable to mistakes, like all mortals," gravely spoke the official, laying aside all signs of jesting.

"Still, you surely have formed an opinion, right or wrong?" persisted the surgeon.

"Naturally, yes, and since you ask it in such earnestness, here you are! It is my solid opinion that Martin Bridgewater must show perfectly clean hands, or else fare worse!"

Although Doctor Danger must have known something of this nature was coming, he visibly shrunk from those cold, measured words, much as if a careless hand had touched a still raw sore.

"I can't think *he* would go that far, Gowdy, although I know he is a—is anything but an angel of truth and honor," said Dangerfield, with unfeigned earnestness in both face and tones. "I'd far sooner believe my friend of the train was the guilty one!"

"Since the bloody deed is done, and past helping," said Gowdy, in low but resolute tones, "I'll say just this much more: I hope Martin Bridgewater murdered Darius Gordon, and I sincerely trust that I'll be able to prove him the guilty one!"

"Why?"

"Because, with *him* fairly out of the way, there will be a fair chance for a sad mistake to be rectified, at last!"

Doctor Danger flushed hotly at this slow, earnest speech, but turned paler than ever as his right hand went out to clasp that of his old friend, and his tones were far from steady as he muttered:

"I thank you, Gowdy, but—two wrongs never yet made a right, and I'll fight for Martin Bridgewater so long as I believe he is an innocent man!"

"So will I, Harold, but—Martin Bridgewater has got to show that he is guiltless of this last crime, first!"

Doctor Danger was hardly feeling able to prolong that dispute, and glancing at his watch, finding it considerably past meridian, he again thanked his old friend, promising to drop in to report in case aught of interest should turn up, then hastily took his departure.

When once fairly out of sight of the station, Doctor Danger slackened his pace, fingers tightly locked in each other behind his back, head drooping forward and shoulders bowed after a manner very unlike the surgeon's customary erect, military carriage.

Oblivious to all around him, Harlow Dangerfield was brooding over the past, which had taken so different a turn from what he had fondly outlined in those halcyon days before—well, before the gates of paradise were forever barred to him!

That was before he had entered the army, and when a very flattering future seemed before the bright, popular, talented young physician. That was when love smiled upon him as well. That was when all appeared bright and prosperous, and life seemed rarely well worth living.

His memory turned back to those days, now, and then paused at the time when trouble first showed itself; only a tiny cloud at first, but which spread with stunning rapidity until the whole heavens were darkened as with a funeral pall!

Harlow Dangerfield and Marian Gordon were under promise of marriage, then, but a quarrel arose, the lover never knew just what, or how, for ere he could fully realize that an explanation had become necessary, the terrible blow fell upon him with stunning force.

At that precise time Dangerfield was away from town, on important business, and his first intimation of breakers ahead came in the shape of a brief, fierce, almost incoherent note from Marian Gordon, charging him with—just what, he vainly strove to imagine.

He wrote back, avowing his innocence of wrong, and protesting his undying love; but he could not at once return to St. Louis, and before he could arrange matters so he could start, the post brought him—the wedding-cards of Mr. and Mrs. Martin Bridgewater!

There had been a prior rivalry between Dangerfield and Bridgewater, and he had suspected that defeated rival of causing this misunderstanding; but anything like this sudden marriage had never once occurred to him as possible.

That totally unexpected blow turned the doctor half crazy, and dropping all else, he took the first train for home, but only to find, on arriving at St. Louis, that the recently wedded couple had departed for the East, but with what particular destination in view, no one seemed able to tell him.

Even Darius Gordon, the bride's father, could give the half-distracted man but little light, and no consolation whatever. His

daughter had acted wholly without advice from him, and he had not known of the contemplated marriage until less than one hour before it took place.

No doubt it was for the best that Harlow Dangerfield failed to hit off the trail of the newly wedded couple while his brain was so nearly crazed, else a terrible tragedy might have marked that record; but no clue could be found, and his first fierce quest proved all in vain.

Then, when calmer reason came back to him, and he realized that all must be at an end between his once-sweetheart and himself, Dangerfield threw up his practice and entered the service.

He *knew* now, what he could only *guess* then, that Martin Bridgewater had wrought all that black wrong, but—*she was still his wife!*

"And he is a murderer!" inwardly groaned the surgeon, for he had hardly the ghost of a doubt but what Chief Gowdy had reasoned aright!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SURGEON DETECTIVE.

GIVING a start as though those dangerous words had been uttered loudly enough to catch other ears, Doctor Dangerfield stared about him until he could fairly locate himself.

Until now he had paid no attention to his course, so deeply buried in bitter memories had he been, but that searching look told him he had wandered nearly back to the point where his keen eyes had first recognized Emory Fitch that morning.

Glancing at his watch, Doctor Danger saw that it was long past the hour of noon, and despite the anxiety which still filled his brain, his healthy body reminded him that the dinner hour had gone by without the customary tribute being paid.

It seemed just a little odd, even annoying, to find himself such a slave to material custom, but Doctor Danger was old enough now to know that a healthy body requires substantial food, and making his way to the same restaurant where he had entertained the "Little Corporal" with his recital of adventure, he gave a liberal order and was soon engaged in clearing the various dishes.

While eating, Doctor Danger began to more methodically arrange his plans for the immediate future, and after settling his score and lighting a cigar at the cashier's desk, he left the establishment and at once turned his face toward the Gordon residence.

Although he had never visited that house but once, and then had set out from a widely different point, Doctor Danger had an almost perfect sense of locality, and found very little difficulty in reaching the scene of that, as yet, mysterious slaying.

As he had been given to understand, the premises were still under police supervision, but the officers on duty were the same who had been on the spot when Doctor Danger first arrived, and they had seen him on intimate terms with their superior officer.

Still, the surgeon did not have to depend on this for admission, as he still carried the card given him by Chief Gowdy. He showed this to the officer whom he first encountered, and then, on strength of it, asked a number of questions.

Among other points he gathered that the corpse had been removed from the building, and was now being cared for by the undertaking firm to which Chief Gowdy had consigned it.

Another fact was that Luke Elder had left, while the deaf old body-servant, Roger Quayle, remained at the house, lying on a lounge in his room on the lower floor, seemingly stupefied by his master's horrible fate.

"My mate's keeping one eye over him, sir, but that's only according to orders," added the officer, willing enough to talk, it seemed. "The chief reckons he knows more'n he's told, so far, but I don't know; looks to me mighty like a case of sudden-goloon!"

"I'd as soon suspect myself of the crime, as to think Roger Quayle would or could harm even so much as a hair of his master's head," the surgeon earnestly declared. "Keep an eye over him, if such are your orders, but

don't harm or disturb the poor old fellow more than is absolutely necessary."

Slipping a yellow coin into the ready hand which he had little difficulty in finding, and knowing that Roger would fare none the worse for that little investment, Doctor Danger passed on, into the house, and showing his card to the second officer whom he met there, ascended to the second story where was the death-room.

Entering this, and finding it without other occupants, Doctor Danger closed and locked the door behind himself, thus guarding against intrusion without his receiving ample notice.

Having done this, the surgeon, who was at last fairly engaged in detective work, took from his breast pocket the article which he had removed from the gilt knob at the bottom of the gasolier while Detective Brown and Chief Gowdy were engaged in hunting for the missing bullet.

Hanging this precisely as when it had first caught his notice, Doctor Danger gazed with strong interest upon—an ordinary advertising calendar!

But there was one interesting fact about this particular calendar: a small, ragged hole marked the center of the leaves which contained the days of each month, the present one, and those yet to come.

"There is where the lead passed, after killing poor Gordon," mused Dangerfield, his high forehead wrinkling with intense thought. "Unless there was more than one shot fired, which is hardly likely, I take it. And now—to work, old man!"

As the calendar hung, it was easy to see that the bullet had first touched the paper in front, or toward the desk, near the shuttered window; and Doctor Danger took this as a starting point for his calculations.

"Gordon stood almost precisely my own height, and was nearly my build. The bullet entered his body *here*, emerging *here*," at the same time touching his own body, back and front, then fixing eyes upon the bullet-pierced calendar and drawing a mental line as he slowly backed away toward the desk.

Pausing when his intuition told him he must be very nearly right, Doctor Danger found that he was very near the revolving chair which still stood in front of the desk.

"Right here, or hereabouts, poor Gordon must have been standing when he was shot, unless my theory is radically wrong!" muttered the surgeon-detective, his face showing pale and stern-set in that dim light.

Turning again, the surgeon saw that there was ample room for another personage to have occupied that office-chair at the instant the death-shot was fired, but—if so, who had it been?

A shiver flashed over that sinewy frame, and averting his eyes, the doctor once more gazed at the calendar, then on beyond it.

The lighter paper, on which the dates were little better than a dim blur in that dimmer light, even for those eagle-eyes, showed distinctly enough when brought into relief against the darker background, and from where Doctor Danger was now making his observations, the lighter square came near the lower edge of an oil-painting hanging from the further wall.

Holding his left hand at the level of that imaginary wound in his breast, Doctor Danger cautiously stooped until his eyes were on a level with his forefinger, then drew a long breath of relief.

"If I'm reasoning aright, the lead ought to lie very close to *that* point," the surgeon-detective muttered, brushing a hand across his damp brows before stepping forward to grasp a chair by the back.

Still he hesitated to put his theory to the ultimate test, with an odd tremor which no professional detective could or would have felt; but all this was new and thrillingly strange to Doctor Danger, and he could not help thinking that, should his calculations prove well founded, they might be the means of condemning some fellow-being to the gallows!

"It's easy enough to say that he richly merits such a doom, but when it comes to helping tie that knot—ugh!"

But then, as he recalled the ghastly face of his old friend, and knew how brutally that life had been snuffed out, Doctor Danger rallied, with a glow of hot, fierce vengeance quickening his pulses.

Carrying the chair to the other end of the long room, the surgeon-detective planted it directly under that particular oil painting—one of half a dozen with which the walls were ornamented—and stepped up on its seat, hands lifting to grasp that massive walnut frame, tilting the painting so as to catch a more favorable slant of light for the visual examination.

His gaze failed to detect the mark they were looking for, and Doctor Danger again caught his breath sharply, letting the picture gently swing back to its former position, while he turned upon the chair, to glance along the room, his brain swiftly working.

One thing was positive: a bullet had made those holes through the half dozen calendar-leaves. Doctor Danger had too often made use of pretty much such a rude target for rifle or pistol, to fall into any serious error on that particular point.

He recalled the revolver discovered by Detective Brown, earlier in the day, and likewise remembered the fact that the weapon showed signs of having recently been discharged: smoke stains at the muzzle, still black, and the pointed hammer resting firmly upon an empty cartridge-case.

Still, Darius Gordon was hardly a man who would fire an idle shot in his own room, at such an odd target as the calendar afforded.

"I'll stick to it!" almost doggedly mused the surgeon. "Gordon was shot from behind, and at such an angle that the bullet rose nearly six inches while passing through his body, unless—which is possible—he was stooping slightly forward when the lead struck him. Now, how does all that figure out?"

Once more his active brain sent his eyes along that imaginary line from calendar to desk, then returning to the picture hanging there near his head as he stood upon the chair.

The result was still the same, and frowning as he muttered:

"I'm almost positive the bullet was not deflected while passing through Gordon's body. I *know* it could not have encountered a bone, taking the course it did. So—either yonder bullet-hole lies, or its mate is right here, within reach of my hand!"

His belief strengthened by this conviction, Doctor Danger once more scanned the painting by that dim light, and once again—failed!

But then, strangely irritated by his repeated failures, the surgeon-detective gripped the heavy frame and swung it clear of the papered wall, meaning to take it down and bear it across to the window for a better examination. And then a low, relieved exclamation burst from his lips, for the discovery was made!

A passing glance at the back of the canvas showed a few broken threads, looking fresh and clean in contrast with the dust which covered all the rest of that surface; and then, reaching up a finger-tip, Doctor Danger found the hole, until then invisible because located in the middle of a dark and heavily painted tree-top.

"What would Brother Brown say now?" exclaimed the amateur detective, as he struck a match with one hand, while the other swung that frame and canvas to one side.

As the little torch flared up brightly, Doctor Danger held it up so as to cast the yellow light upon the dark-papered wall back of that hole in the picture, and almost instantly he met with his reward.

There, hardly buried in the plaster, yet kept from rebounding by the stiff paper through which it had forced a way, the fatal bit of lead was visible, the light gleaming from a polished streak, no doubt through passing out of a rifled barrel.

The bit of lead was beyond his reach as he stood, but dropping the match and substituting a long pencil, Doctor Danger quickly poked the bullet out of its resting-place, deftly catching it as it fell.

Letting the picture swing back into place, the surgeon came to the floor, then crossed over to the shuttered window, where the canted venetians admitted a clearer light.

The bullet bore distinct marks of the lands which it had taken as the powder exploded, and there was a faint bruise made by the hard plaster of the wall, but no such "up-setting" as must have resulted from the

missile coming into contact with a bone of the human body.

"Then it *ought* to be an easy matter to spell out the rest of it!" muttered Doctor Danger. "*From where was this shot fired?*"

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER SOLUTION SUGGESTED.

ENOUGH has been said to show that he who was now trying his hand at this murder mystery, had already formed a strong opinion, but where so much might be at stake, Doctor Danger felt it only right that each step in advance should be fairly proven before another was attempted.

His first examination of Darius Gordon's body gave him an idea of what he was now drawing forth, little by little, and this theory was only strengthened by finding that bullet-pierced calendar.

It was mainly for the purpose of testing this theory that the surgeon secured the pass from Chief Gowdy, and he had returned to the house when he felt fairly well assured of having a clear field for his investigations, armed to meet such emergencies as he could anticipate.

Placing the bullet in his pocket for later examination, Doctor Danger set about *proving* the exact position Darius Gordon must have occupied when shot, data for which he now believed was at hand.

From a side-pocket he produced a coil of stout string, together with a nail. Finding a metal paper-weight in one of the desk pigeon-holes, he returned to the other end of the room.

First unhooking the picture which had been struck by the death dealing missile, Doctor Danger rested it against the wall in that corner of the room, then looked about for some method of lifting himself nearer the ceiling.

That was not a difficult matter in an apartment so comfortably furnished, and lightly mounting the dresser, the surgeon quickly drove the nail into the print left by the bullet, then descended, one end of the twine-coil being firmly looped around the nail.

Taking the other end of the string, Dangerfield passed it through the hole piercing the calendar, drawing the slack until the twine was taut, then backing off in a direct line until the string formed a perfectly straight line when held against his front, precisely where the bullet had emerged from the corpse.

Not until he was fully satisfied that his test was perfect, so far, did Doctor Danger permit his eyes to remove from the string; but then, with a long breath of relief and powerful interest, he saw that he stood almost exactly upon the spot where his first calculation had led him.

That was about three feet from the revolving chair, and once again the surgeon-detective mentally asked himself—*what next?*

Was it not growing perfectly clear that the assassin must have been occupying that very chair? How could that wound have been inflicted by one in an erect position? And, if from that chair, what was indicated?

"Who would be seated there, in *his* chair, at *his* desk, at such an hour?" Doctor Danger asked himself, and not for the first time, either.

Certainly not a stranger, and still more positively not the woman who had on two different occasions attempted the life of the surgeon, she whom Dangerfield believed to be Josefa, wife of Vincente Gayferos, smuggler, bandit, revolutionist.

As sober reason forced him to abandon this reading of the dark riddle, the grimly-uttered words of Chief Gowdy reverted to his mind, and Doctor Danger shivered anew.

Bitter cause as he had for hating Martin Bridgewater, he would not wish this crime traced to his red hand. For, after all, the wife must share the punishment measured out to the husband!

Many such reflections flashed through the uneasy brain of the surgeon, but all at once he gave a start and a low cry, the string dropping from his fingers as though it had become a red-hot wire.

His uneasy gaze passed by the desk and chair, and was idly fixed upon the light coming in through those closed blinds, just as he

had looked in that direction so many times before; but now—might there not be another reading of this bloody riddle?

There was room to reach the shutters without disturbing the chair, and leaving the end of twine unheeded as it had fallen from his suddenly tingling fingers, Doctor Danger stooped to peer through the slats.

These had not been shifted since his first look into that room, and were turned so as to permit both light and air to freely pass into the apartment; so there was nothing to hinder the surgeon from winning a fairly unobstructed view of out-of-doors.

The first glance showed him the open space of ground beyond, and the wide-topped white-elm tree to the trunk of which Chief Gowdy had hitched his trotter that morning when first arriving.

Then, lowering his eyes a bit, Doctor Danger took note of the roof of the veranda, and then he knew that his latest thought was not entirely wild: that it at least was possible Darius Gordon had come by his death through the aim of one outside of that room!

Slightly canting one side of the shutters, Dangerfield swept his keen gaze over the wooden roof, though hardly knowing what he was looking for, or what he wished to discover.

It was a purely instinctive action, yet it was almost immediately rewarded by a discovery which might prove to be of great importance when all evidence bearing upon that crime was carefully sifted.

As heretofore noted, a luxuriant mass of woodbine wreathed the ends of the long veranda with its dark foliage, clambering over the stout wooden railing which surmounted the porch-roof, and then stretching out with tendriled fingers to fasten upon the frame-building, clinging here and there and spreading wider as it climbed, until the shingled roof of the house itself was reached.

The vine was wreathed about the railing as well, and several of its rank branches crossed from railing to house, thus forming a sort of covered nook at each end of the roof.

One more fact the surgeon-detective noted, then drew back with a sense of prudent forethought.

"Two witnesses are better than one!" he muttered, moving those slats back as they had been before his hand disturbed them. "Gowdy would take my bare word, of course, but better leave as little room for doubt or questioning as may be!"

Doctor Danger turned toward the door while muttering these words, but paused with brief irresolution as he noticed that length of twine.

"Why not that, as well?" he asked himself. "If I've struck the right scent at last, *that* will form a portion of the proof!"

Leaving all as it was, then, Doctor Danger unlocked the door and left the room where the stock-broker had been found dead.

Passing down the stairs to the ground-floor, Dangerfield answered with a faint smile the look of inquiry cast his way by the policeman left on duty there by Chief Gowdy.

"You are not limited to this floor, of course, officer?" was his address. "You can go upstairs with me, to note a few facts?"

"Certainly, if you wish me to do so, sir," came the prompt reply. "Have you made any discoveries, then, sir?"

"There is a point or two I'd like to have your opinion upon, yes. Can you go back with me at once, officer?"

"In one moment. I'll just let McBreen know where I've gone, in case anything—" the remainder being left to imagination as he called out to his partner: "Keep an eye both ways, Patsy, will you? I'm going upstairs for a minute or so."

"All right, Norris," came the ready response, and then, closing the door again, the officer turned to join Doctor Danger.

The officer was a bright, intelligent-looking fellow, and as Chief Gowdy had plainly considered him trustworthy, the surgeon thought he would be fully justified in doing the same thing; and so, when the room bearing those ugly red stains was reached, and those dark eyes took note of the drooping twine, a brief but frank explanation was given.

"This is one of the points I wished to call your attention to, Mr. Norris," added

the surgeon, not without a trace of triumph stirring his blood as he recalled the different theory advanced by the detective for whom he had taken so strong an aversion. "Detective Brown held that my theory was wrong, and hence it's just as well to have good backing when I try to shift that burden to his shoulders. Understand?"

"And glad enough to do my part toward the shifting, sir," came the prompt response. "That fellow thinks he knows it all, and that there's nothing left for anybody else after he takes one look over the field!"

Doctor Danger still further illustrated his meaning by stretching the string and taking the position he had so carefully studied out by himself. Then, letting the twine drop, he turned again to the window, and reminding Norris that the slats had been opened, as now, when the corpse was first found, lifted the catch and swung both halves back against the building.

Hardly knowing what he expected to see, the officer came nearer as Doctor Danger drew aside to permit his passage without moving the office-chair.

"That roof is stout enough to hold up more than one full grown man, I take it," observed the doctor quietly. "Will you take a closer look and see if there is—you have it, then?" his tones abruptly altering as the policeman gave an exclamation.

"There's where a leaf has been mashed on the roof, and it looks as though—*fresh, too!*"

"That was *one* thing I noticed before I decided to call you, so as to have full proof that I did not leave the sign, myself," coolly declared Doctor Danger, passing by the officer and stepping through the window to the roof of the piazza.

The surgeon-detective bent over that mashed leaf for a few seconds, but then passed it by without remark, moving toward the east end of the boarding, there pausing to examine another and larger leaf-stain.

Even while making this examination, the surgeon had his notice attracted by still other proofs that the roof had been occupied by a human being at no very remote period, and rising erect, turned toward the curious and interested officer, grimly speaking:

"Gordon was shot from this roof, and not by a gentleman, either!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PRINCIPAL, OR ACCOMPLICE?

POLICEMAN NORRIS gave a start at this positive assertion, but quickly spoke in his turn:

"How do you make *that* out, sir?"

"Come out here and I'll explain, but—Careful, man! Don't disturb that broken leaf, nor touch *this* one, either!"

Norris obeyed, looking pretty well bewildered, but Doctor Danger was himself too deeply interested to care much for that, and speedily advanced the proofs on which he based his assertion.

"Martin Bridgewater never killed Darius Gordon! The assassin was a rough, and not a gentleman, even in outward seeming!"

"How do you figure all that out, sir?" asked Norris, with growing incredulity, even as his gaze followed the pointing finger of the Doctor Detective.

Where the thickly massed woodbine extended from the railing to the side of the house, a low, yet fairly-sized recess was formed, and here the leaves and young shoots of the vine had been ruthlessly crushed as by some heavy weight, and close to the building was a quid of tobacco, as well as a number of stains, the result of spitting.

"By all this you can see that some man was on this roof, no longer ago than last night," began the doctor, crisply. "If longer ago than that, both quid and spittle would be more nearly dry. *That* shows, plainly enough, no gentleman was here, doesn't it?"

"But gentlemen chew tobacco, don't they?"

"Of course, and sometimes they use plug tobacco, too," as he pointed out a small bit of "plug" lying near those stains. "But when you put all sign together—for instance: chewing coarse tobacco, wearing coarse, cheap foot-gear—"

"How do you make that last out, though?"

Doctor Danger pointed to where an ivy leaf had been crushed and the pine boards marked by a heavy heel.

"Look at the size of it, for one thing, but the nails count most: did you ever know a gentleman—say of Martin Bridgewater's position in society—to wear a heel *like that*? Those brads are used only in cowhide boots, or extra heavy brogans!"

Almost in spite of himself, Policeman Norris was convinced by this line of argument. Every point seemed perfect, as far as they had gone, and the Doctor Detective was not yet through with his circumstantial evidence.

"Bear in mind all you've seen here, Norris, for both you and I may be called on to bear witness before both coroner and court, after this," Dangerfield said, earnestly, then moved back to the window, as before taking pains not to create fresh marks, nor to disturb the sign so lately discovered.

"Don't forget that the sash was raised, Norris," he added, pausing at the window for a brief space. "The slats are plenty wide enough for a gun to be poked through so far that no trace of powder-smoke would mar them. And—wait a moment longer, please!"

Quickly passing through the opening into the room, Doctor Danger once more took position on the precise spot where his calculations had convinced him Darius Gordon was standing when the death-shot was fired.

"Swing the shutters to, Norris!" he called back over a shoulder, as soon as that station was satisfactorily secured. "Now—use your best judgment, man! Could the death-shot have been fired from there, through the shutters?"

"Just as easy as not, sir!"

"And I'm not too far away for the flame to scorch cloth?"

This time the answer was less prompt, still it came, pretty much as expected:

"No-o, I hardly think you are, unless the burn was *very* strong. Was it, sir? I didn't get a square look at the body, remember."

"Not at all pronounced, and might never have been noticed at all, or else might have been explained after another fashion, only for the fact of the shot having entered right there," thoughtfully answered the surgeon, opening the shutters and lending the officer a hand for his easier entrance.

Closing the blinds and lowering the sash, Doctor Danger removed his string and nail, placing both in his pocket. With the policeman's aid he rehung the oil painting, and after putting the dresser back to where it had originally stood, he also removed the bullet-pierced calendar and stowed it securely away inside his vest.

"I'll keep these to show the chief, you understand," was his explanation to the closely-observant officer. "Of course you'll say nothing about what we've ciphered out, for the present?"

"Not until questioned by those I'm in duty bound to answer, sir," came the instant reply.

"That, of course. Arrange it all in your mind, then lock it up tight as you know how, until the time for speaking rolls 'round."

Opening the door, Doctor Danger led the way down-stairs, passing through the wide hall and out upon the shaded veranda, too deeply interested in the discoveries he had made, and was still hoping to extend, to notice the haggard, frightened face which peered at the two men from a partly opened door across the hall.

This was the face of Roger Quayle, and with shuffling, far from steady steps the old body-servant moved from his refuge, keeping those athletic figures in view, yet seemingly desirous of avoiding observation on his side.

Doctor Danger seemed carrying out an idea of his own, which he had already fairly blocked out, for without the slightest hesitation he led the way to the east end of the veranda, outside of the woodbine-covered lattice-work.

A path ran around this end of the porch, evidently leading to a side door, as well as to the outbuildings still further to the rear; but Doctor Danger paid no attention to that

or to them; his eager gaze was fixed upon that mass of dark foliage, the season having been just wet enough to lend the woodbine an unusually powerful growth, each five-fingered leaf showing large, full of moisture, the whole forming a green screen through which not a ray of light could penetrate.

"I knew it! Look, Norris!" exclaimed the detective, pointing to a number of breaks in that mass, where leaves were crushed so badly that they were beginning to wilt, and to a couple of young shoots broken entirely in two. "Our man climbed up to the roof of the porch right here!"

"Either up or down that's a fact, sir!"

"Not down, be sure," confidently asserted Dangerfield, bending low and beginning to quarter the ground like a close-hunting hound on a very cold scent. "If he shot Gordon—and I'm almost ready to stake my life on that!—he'd never stop to climb down that fashion."

Norris joined in the hunt, and being less cautious than the surgeon because he had so much less at stake, he it was who made the next discovery; and as Dangerfield came to his excited call, he pointed to where two footprints, deeply impressed, marked the less trodden ground at the west end of the veranda.

"Your man jumped down right here, sir!" he cried, exultantly.

"Yes, and—what did I tell you about it's being a rough, not a gentleman like Martin Bridgewater?" supplemented the surgeon, his keen eye noting yet another link in the rapidly growing chain. "See where he caught himself from falling outright, and note what a broad hand, what thick, stumpy fingers!"

Even so: there in the soft, moist earth of a pansy-border, was the nearly complete imprint of a coarse, clumsy, powerful left hand. Beyond a reasonable doubt, the man who owned that hand had lost his balance when alighting from that jump, and in flinging out a hand to save himself from harm, unwittingly left this telltale sign behind him.

"You're right, and no mistake, sir! Martin Bridgewater never did the job, for—"

"A lie! *He did!* He *must* have done it, I tell you!" came a hoarse agitated cry, and as the two men instantly wheeled, they beheld Roger Quayle, shaking and shivering, holding to a column lest his limbs give way beneath his weight, a look of mingled horror, rage and fear distorting his ghastly pale countenance.

Losing his own color, Doctor Danger sprang to the servant's aid, but not too quick for those lips to add:

"*He* done it! Don't look further—for God's dear sake, don't try to—Martin Bridgewater did the awful deed, I tell you, for—*ah-h!*"

Overtaken nature gave way, and only for the quick grasp of the doctor, Quayle must have received an awkward if not dangerous fall.

Bearing him inside the house and back to his own room, Dangerfield did what he could to help the poor fellow, but, while consciousness returned, Roger seemed unable to comprehend what was asked him, or to give better reasons for his wild denunciation of Martin Bridgewater.

"See that the poor fellow comes to no harm, Norris," said the surgeon, leaving the house of trouble and pausing at the edge of the rapidly deepening twilight. "He's nearly crazed by this sad event, and is not at all responsible for what he says or does."

"Then you don't think there's anything in what he said about Mr. Bridgewater, sir? Well," as Dangerfield shook his head emphatically, "I can't think *his* way, either, but one thing is dead sure: the old man knows a good deal more about this killing than he's told, so far!"

With a few words calculated to weaken this unfortunate impression, Doctor Danger left the premises, heading through the gloom for the Central Station, meaning to report his discoveries to Chief Gowdy; but as he passed along, buried in deep thought, in which Martin Bridgewater played a conspicuous part, a vicious assault was made upon the surgeon.

Two or more men leaped from ambush upon him, striking hard as they came! Then, smothered by a muffler, and choked by a strong hand, he fell!

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEXICAN VENDETTA.

It was a well-planned and desperate assault, yet one where capture rather than death seemed the winning point.

Without sound or sign by way of warning, two stout fellows sprung out upon Doctor Danger, and while each thug struck as he came, those blows were calculated to stun rather than to slay.

As the surgeon staggered before their combined attack, one of the ruffians flung a thick, heavy blanket over his head and shoulders, while his mate curved an arm around Dangerfield's neck, lending his other hand to forming the dreaded garrote.

Taken so utterly by surprise though he was, with his brain whirling beneath those ugly blows, Doctor Danger fought to the extent of his ability, and their legs becoming entangled, the trio fell heavily to the pavement.

Then, only a few feet to one side, a door opened and a guarded yet fierce voice made itself heard:

"Here, Ned! Quick—to cover, man!"

As though in obedience to this call, the surgeon, still struggling as best his hampered powers would permit, was dragged from pavement to floor, and after that door was closed behind them all, vicious hands were quickly at his throat under those suffocating folds, and little by little his wind was shut off until insensibility came!

How long an interval was covered by this unconsciousness, Harlow Dangerfield had no means of deciding when his senses began to rally. In truth, he seemed like one in a nightmare dream for several minutes after he had a dim, uncertain sense of being alive, with human voices coming indistinctly to his ears.

Before long, however, the surgeon began to feel the smarting of his bruises, and to realize that he must have fallen alive into the power of mortal enemies, since his limbs were bound, and a bandage was secured about his head, effectually shutting out all light and vision.

So far he could reason, but beyond that his powers were wholly at fault, doubtless because of the rough handling he had received. His wits were all mixed up, and his brain seemed a chaotic jumble.

Presently a rude hand gripped one of his shoulders, shaking him with vigor, then demanding in a coarse, gruff tone of voice:

"Where's the dingbats, cully? What have you done with your boodle?"

"I don't—what is it?" huskily mumbled the prisoner, hardly knowing what were the words which passed his lips.

"The money? The sparklers? What have you done with them all?" reiterated that coarse voice, and although he failed to recognize the speaker by the tones, Doctor Danger did catch his meaning.

Like magic that confusing mist was swept away from his brain, and he knew the very worst, now!

This was merely another effort to regain possession of the smuggler's treasure, and it was to be literally "your money or your life!"

In those half-dozen seconds a vast deal flashed through that awakened brain. Doctor Danger seemed to see again the veiled woman who had so desperately assaulted him immediately after his arrival in Chicago. He saw again the lithe form and the viciously glittering eyes of the being who murderously struck at his life while on the train, just pulling out from Alton.

Then, too, returned an image of poor Darius Gordon as he had seen the murdered stock-broker, lying weltering in his own blood that morning!

Almost instantly his determination was taken, and before that delay in answering exhausted the patience of his captors, Doctor Danger said:

"I'm tongue-tied so long as you keep me blinded. Give me at least the ghost of a show, or you can run the game without my assistance."

This was rather an audacious bluff to at-

tempt under existing circumstances, but the Doctor Detective felt that he had more to gain than to lose by making the effort.

His bold speech seemed to take his enemies off their guard at first, for he heard a quick shuffling of feet, then the low buzzing of human voices, doubtless in consultation with each other.

Following this came an ominous silence, and as moments grew into minutes, Doctor Danger felt his flesh begin to quiver and to creep as he anticipated—what?

That was not so easily said, yet whatever might come, it could hardly be pleasant or welcome!

Then, clear and distinct in tones, there came a feminine voice:

"Give him his will, so far, gentlemen. Why so cruel as to deny the last request of a dying mortal?"

Presently fingers were fumbling at the knotted blindfold, and as the cloth was jerked away, the yellow glare of an oil lamp directly in front of his face nearly blinded the surgeon.

This was only temporary, however, and then Doctor Danger began taking mental notes, beginning with the human shapes within his range of vision.

These were three in number, two men, one woman, the former pair being pretty well disguised by up-turned coat-collars and slouched hats, but the latter evidently scorning any such attempt at mystification as she boldly stood forth in the full glow of the kerosene lamp.

She was tall and slender, yet with something in her build that recalled the graceful strength of a leopard.

Her hair, eyes and complexion were dark, although not more so than those of many an American woman with whom the surgeon held acquaintance; yet he instinctively felt that here was a foreigner—and, almost as surely one of Spanish descent!

Doubtless the adventures which had already come his way through being so intimately connected with the smuggler's treasure had something to do with this intuition, but not entirely; those gleaming, serpent-like eyes! Surely he had seen them before this!

A movement on the part of the two men drew the surgeon's notice their way for a brief space, and during those seconds he took their likeness, mentally.

One, taller and more slender than his mate, was garbed after the ordinary, "ready made" fashion, yet something in his carriage as well as movements, strongly hinted at cowboy training.

The other man, powerfully built yet short of stature, with massive limbs and large extremities, was even more certainly a product of city slums, a typical thug and ward bully, strongly tinctured with burglarism, if not the higher art of safe-blowing.

All this was photographed by the prisoner in a remarkably brief space of time, and his conclusions were reached before those red lips parted to pronounce the words:

"You have your will, senor, and now—'tis my turn! Where are the diamonds and the money you so basely stole from Vincente Gayferos?"

This was confirmation with a vengeance!

Although the woman spoke with hardly an accent, and would readily have passed anywhere or any time for an American woman of unmixed race, she undoubtedly was Josefa Gayferos, the now widow of the notorious smuggler and bandit, Vincente Gayferos.

Doctor Danger recalled what little he had heard concerning the woman who had on more than one occasion proved herself the boldest, most daring of aids to her lawless husband.

He knew that Josefa was reputed to have Indian blood in her veins, although the general acceptance of her birth was that while her father was of Spanish or Mexican blood, her mother had been purely American. And this last fact no doubt accounted for her fluent command of English.

Swiftly as these reflections passed through his busy brain, the delay was too great for that fiery impatience, and Josefa Gayferos again made her demand:

"Speak, you dog of a thief! Where have you hidden the money and the precious stones stolen from my husband? Speak, or—"

Before his eyes flashed a naked blade, the peculiar pattern of which strongly recalled the weapon whose point had so narrowly escaped finding his heart the day before!

"Why do you ask me that?" Doctor Danger ejaculated, in a tone of mingled surprise and doubt. "I don't understand what—"

"Lying dog!" and with a lightning-like motion such as only a past mistress in the art of manipulating a dirk could have exhibited, Josefa Gayferos seemed striking with all vengeance direct for his heart, yet altered both course and force, to lay that cool steel firmly across the prisoner's lips.

"Why do I ask you, devil of a liar?" fiercely cried the woman, her face bent nearer his, those eyes, now seeming to glow and flash with a living fire, glaring straight into his. "Because you are the thief! I ask because you led the way to that treasure through blood and death—the blood, the death of my gallant tiger!"

"Why do I ask you, then? Because your lips must speak, and that to one who has hardly lost sight of you for many, many long leagues! Clear from the Rio Grande have I trailed you, dog, thief, assassin! Night and day have I watched and prayed for the saints to vouchsafe me the fair chance to keep sacred my oath—the vow I made above the blood-dripping corse of my tiger, my leopard, my soul—my all!"

Something like a womanly tremor stole into that fierce voice, and as though ashamed at betraying even so much feeling before the eyes of the being whom, by her own admission, she had sworn vendetta against, the smuggler's widow quickly averted her face, withdrawing her dagger.

But this feminine weakness lasted for only a few seconds; and once again Josefa Gayferos confronted the Doctor Detective, coldly saying:

"For the last time I make the demand, you dog of the devil; where is the wealth you stole from Vincente Gayferos?"

"Go ask the one who murdered Darius Gordon, last night!" sternly answered the prisoner, and his words were followed by a sharp exclamation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOCTOR DANGER IN DANGER.

THAT sound came from the lips of the shorter of the two men, and as he saw this, Doctor Danger felt that his risky shot had not entirely missed the target.

This ruffian was just such another in build and general make-up as the Doctor Detective had mentally pictured the fellow whose tracks he had so recently been studying, over at the Gordon place.

Just such a foot as that might have left that heel-print upon the veranda roof, and just such another broad, thick, stumpy-fingered hand it was that dug deep into the moist earth of the pansy border!

All this flashed swiftly through the working brain of the prisoner, but before he could decide just how to follow up his first shot, the burly ruffian stepped nearer, gruffly demanding:

"Measure yer lip, cully! Now, what d'ye mean by that? What's Gordon got to do with this yer' bit o' business—say?"

"Just this much," slowly answered the doctor, keenly studying what he could see of that bristly face between slouched hat and high collar. "That packet of money and diamonds was given to Darius Gordon, in trust, and he was murdered for it, last night! Now—who fired that shot?"

Even as the Doctor Detective pronounced those final words, the stalwart thug turned abruptly away, exposing his broad back instead. And as though moved by the same impulse, the woman and the second man likewise retreated from their prisoner, gathering together in the further end of that fairly spacious apartment, as though for the purpose of consultation.

Such was indeed their present purpose, and the broad-shouldered ruffian it was who had, by an imperious sign, demanded that secret session.

He name was Zack Hinton, and he was St. Louis born and bred: a fair sample of what the lowest, wickedest, vilest of city slums can turn forth as a finished product.

"What is it you desire, senor?" asked

Josefa Gayferos, with a touch of imperious impatience. "Why demand—"

"That's all right, ma'am, but business is business, an' I reckon it's time we was git-tin' thar, too!"

"Why jump the trail, then?" bluntly asked the other man, Ned Watson by name, and cowboy by adoption.

"Is it a trail, though?"

"What makes you doubt that, senor?" sharply demanded the woman, her dark eyes glittering anew, and her fingers toying with the weapon they knew so well how to use on occasion.

"Well, heap sight o' things, come to look 'em all over," doggedly answered the city thug. "Fu'st, though, you never let me hev time fer to take a good, square look over the peppergram, an' so—"

"Because there wasn't any time to waste, man," curtly declared the cowboy. "We had to rope our game on the jump, or run the chance of seeing it give us the slip. And so— *Can't you see, man, dear?*"

"So you said afore, and I took your word for it, didn't I? Went flat ag'in'st all law an' reason, too! Jest because I knowed *you*, an' so tuck both the ma'am, hyar, an' your fairy tale both on your say-so."

"Do you mean to hint that I haven't dealt on the square, Hinton?"

"Peace, senors!" commanded Josefa Gayferos, swiftly interfering in what bade fair to end in something more dangerous than angry words. "Are we wolves, that we must snarl and show ugly teeth to each other?"

"I'm not hunting a fight, and least of all with an old side-pardner like you, Zack; still—don't talk *too* mighty nasty, old man!"

"And *you* keep hat on head in place of over your mouth, cully! You try to talk through it, while I'm clean business—see? Now, take this duck, over yonder—"

"We *have* taken him, haven't we, senor?"

"Yes, but what else? The boodle isn't on his hide, for I've gone over every square inch of that, and so carefully that he hasn't even a mole, freckle or flea that I couldn't go afore the court to swear to!"

"If not on his person, then he must have hidden it, senor."

"Whar, then? Not in his room at the hotel, for I've been thar, and turned it clean wrong side out'ard!"

"When? You never mentioned *that*, Zack!" cut in Watson, with growing interest in face and nervously twitching fingers.

"Because I didn't hev the time, that's all," gruffly explained the city thug. "I was just after comin' from the big hashery, when you two jumped all over me for this job. Time? Why, 'twas just a nip-tuck that we didn't miss the critter after all!"

Zack Hinton scowled across at the prisoner as though he was doubting whether that narrow margin hadn't ought to have been still less, and that bare escape a clean one, for the surgeon. The way matters were turning out, he could almost believe that much.

The faces of the two pals who had sought his services on striking this, a nearly foreign field for them both, were hardly less gloomy, but there was one consolation left the woman.

"At worst, *his* heart shall drain! If only one can be, better vengeance than gold!" came hissing across her white teeth.

"Fer you, mebbe, but blood don't pay me fer my doin's," still more gruffly declared Zack Hinton as he caught those words. "It's rocks I'm playin' fer, an' you don't want to fergit it, nuther; see?"

"Find that package, senor, and you shall name your own wages," coldly declared the smuggler's widow. "Without it—what can we do?"

Zack Hinton spent a few moments thoughtfully rubbing his bristly chin with stumpy thumb and forefinger, staring at vacancy with his pig-like eyes the while. Then he slowly asked:

"You say you sca'cely lost sight of yen' duck from leavin' Chicago until he bunked in at the hotel, ma'am?"

"It is so, senor," declared Josefa, coldly. "I was on the train with him. I dealt him that blow—Satan must have held back my point! I jumped out, but—'twas wild, swift work, and dangerous, senor," with a low, fierce laugh at the memory.

And then Josefa went on to describe how,

reluctant to leave behind her the valuable parcel as well as the (believed) corpse of her enemy, she managed to rally from the shock of her leap, just in time to grasp the hand-rail of the rear coach, dragging for a number of rods before she could draw herself up to safety.

Then, at the next stop, she entered a car by simply stepping from the rear platform, where a locked door forbade her entrance, and stepping on another.

After this, nothing hindered her keeping an eye upon the movements of her human game, from the rear, and when Doctor Danger left the cars at the Union Depot, she did the same.

With a few shrewdly shaped questions, Zack Hinton learned from her of the surgeon's brief visit to a huge office-building, the description of which enabled him to readily recognize the location.

Josefa had followed the doctor far enough to read the sign on the door of the office he entered on that third floor, and as she repeated it, Hinton exploded with an execration.

"Darius Gordon, was it? Holy smoke! That same old duck croaked only last night! And—boodle gone! Not on *his* person, nor in his room at the hashery. Then—who's got the boodle, I want to know?"

In his excitement, the city thug elevated his tone until each word was distinctly audible to their bound captive, and, heedless of the risk he might thus be inviting to himself, Doctor Danger now exclaimed, sternly:

"*You can best answer, for you did the murderous deed!*"

But no notice was paid this charge, save by a passing glance from Josefa Gayferos.

In varied degrees, perhaps, but each one of that trio was ill at ease, and unable to promptly decide just what ought to be their next step in this muddled affair.

"What's to do, now?" gloomily demanded Ned Watson, wiping his brows and pushing that disguising muffler from about his throat. "If 'twas any business out on the range, now, I'd feel good as the next best, but here in town—you tell, Hinton!"

"Can't you see it, then, cully?"

"Never a see, pardner! I'm all astray, and my wits are clean stampeded!"

"Well, don't it look as though we'd got to get shut of this duck, for one thing? He hasn't got the boodle, and don't know who has. See?"

"Unless he is lying, though!" doubtingly ventured the cowboy.

"About leaving the boodle in charge of the broker, you mean?"

"Of course. There's the police—"

"And you're soft enough to reckon he'd trust the cops with a big boodle like that?" fairly exploded the city thug. "Oh, come off, cully!"

Josefa had said nothing since the consultation took such a sudden turn, but while listening to her allies, her black eyes were fixed upon the surgeon, and her slender yet powerful fingers were toying significantly with the silver haft of her triple-edged dirk.

"Wait, senores," she now interposed, a current of fire underlying her speech, "I have thought, and I begin to feel that yonder dog of the devil spoke truth when he said that the treasure was left with the stranger, last night."

"If so, it's a mighty clean good-by to it, fer us, anyway!"

"That may not be, senor. It will be still there, and with none to lay open claim to it—as this hound might do—why not be won by us, so?"

"If it only could! But—this duck—"

"Shall neither claim that treasure, nor stand in our light further than he has already!" cried Josefa, with her deadly hatred flashing out beyond all disguise. "Vengeance—vendetta, for my murdered tiger!"

Crouching like the savage animal she named, the woman flourished her dagger, in the very act of leaping upon the helplessly bound surgeon.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEATH-DOOMED DOCTOR.

BUT the finale was not to come thus, nor just then, and before the female tigress could make her death-leap, the powerful

hand of the city thug caught her wrist, holding her helpless for the instant.

"Whoa-ap! and play ye don't, my lady!" he warned, giving a swing that checked her attempt to twist free, and at the same time placed his massive form in front of the bound man as a shield.

A choking, almost snarling cry came from the woman, and with a fierce oath, Ned Watson jerked out a revolver, backed by the threat:

"Let up, pardner, or I'll lift your roof! What— *Let up, I say!*"

For a brief space the prospects of a "free for all" seemed really admirable, but Zack Hinton had no such longing where pay was lacking, and releasing the woman, he stepped back until close to their captive, speaking hastily:

"Time, the both of ye! Kill if ye like, but make it so we can have at least the ghost of a show for cheating the cops."

If he had attempted to argue against killing the captive, it is almost certain blows and shots would have followed; but taking that particular tone, Josefa Gayferos hesitated, even while crouching for a death-leap upon ally as well as foe.

"He's got to croak, of course," Hinton hastened to add, clinching the nail he had already driven. "All I'm kicking ag'in'st is doin' of the job so it's dead-sure to be laid to us—see?"

"That's insured; anyway," cut in Doctor Dangerfield, who had been watching and listening with strong interest. "Fools! Don't you know that my every step is known, my every movement registered by the police?"

"Then they'll know how to set up your funeral sermon, cully," coarsely retorted the ruffian. "Shut trap, blame you! Your bluffs don't pass for a cent!"

Full of grit though the surgeon assuredly was, there was a certain cold-bloodedness in this manner that put a stop to his speech for the time being.

Although he had repeatedly compared this ruffian with the mental picture he had drawn of Darius Gordon's assassin, and each time with a growing sense that the two might easily prove to be but one and the same, Doctor Dangerfield really felt that Zack Hinton was less to be dreaded than either of the others, particularly by one who was so helplessly at their mercy as himself.

And now, hearing him utter such carelessly bloodthirsty sentences, a cold shiver crept over his frame, and for the first time he asked himself how this adventure would end.

At a nod from Josefa, the cowboy put up his gun, and though she still held her dagger bared, she showed no signs of a desire to use the blade upon their burly ally.

"It is merely to decide the manner of his death, senor?" she asked, her voice once more under perfect control. "It is not the other—a fight to turn the devil's dog free, with life?"

"I'd fight ag'in'st *that*, and ag'in'st *you*, ma'am, ef you was so crazy as to think it that way!" promptly answered the thug.

The woman laughed briefly, showing her strong white teeth in fierce derision at the mere idea so bluntly suggested.

"Crazy I would be, indeed, senor! Free? Unpunished? Rather would I drive this blade to my own heart—a thousand times—yes!"

Zack Hinton shrugged his broad shoulders at this wild outburst. He was hardly fine-grained enough to either understand or appreciate this overwrought sentiment, but he was shrewd enough to let it pass without actual remark.

"Well, we're in a heap so far as the main job goes. This gent has both seen and heard a mighty sight too much for to be turned out on the loose with a live clapper; but—what're we goin' to do with the cold meat after fixin' it?"

"Chuck it out doors for the coyotes to snarl over, when it's good and dark night," briskly suggested the cowboy.

The burly ruffian showed his tobacco-stained teeth in a surly grin, as he received this off-hand advice, but which was plainly offered in good faith by Watson.

"That sort of work might answer 'way out yender, cully, but—well, *this* isn't your

cattle-range, and where *you* talk of coyotes, I can see cops—devil roast 'em, too!"

A puzzled look came into the cowboy's face, and he turned toward Josefa, as though expecting aid from thence. But she, too, was somewhat out of her natural element here in a great city, and had no suggestion ready, other than a repetition.

"He shall die—did I not make oath above the bloody heart of my gallant tiger? Did I not stain red my hand, my lips, my steel? Did I not vow, in the sight of Heaven, the Virgin, and all her saints?"

"Reckon you did, since you say so, ma'am," politely asserted the thug, "but when you come to tackle a hangin' job like this, hyar in the city, it isn't the biggest part o' the work to shut off the wind. *That's* dead easy! What comes toughest is *gittin' shet of the proof*, don't ye know?"

Josefa Gayferos made an impatient gesture at this, then said:

"Settle it to your liking, senor, but bear in mind this: yonder dog of the devil *must* die, and *mine* must be the hand that ends his life! Beyond this, I care nothing. Only—time passes, and there is other work to be attended to."

Through all this Doctor Dangerfield remained silent, but at the same time he was not paralyzed by fear. He was testing his bonds, applied during that interval of unconsciousness, and despite the fact that the thongs seemed very strong, and the knots too carefully drawn for slipping them, he had not yet begun to despair getting into condition for making a stout fight for his life.

He said nothing, partly because he did not wish to call attention his way before completing his test, partly through a belief that such interruption would only hasten the death-doom which was under consideration just then.

"It'd be easy enough, ma'am, if he was nothin' better or bigger'n the dog you call him," said Hinton, with a touch of impatience entering his own tones at such lack of sober reason. "But when it comes to stickin' a full-growed man—too much *sign*, I tell ye!"

"Maybe you can offer a better way, pardner?"

"If I couldn't, he'd go on livin' while I could stand atween him an' the knife, you can bet your boots on that, cully!"

"Listen, senor," and Josefa Gayferos drew a bit closer to the burly ruffian, keeping time to her words with that glittering bit of steel. "I have followed yonder dog for thousands of miles, solely for the purpose of avenging the murder of my gallant husband!"

"'Tis true, there was a vast treasure, as well, but much as I wanted to regain *that*, I wanted *vengeance* far more! And so—the dog shall die, even though it cost me my life as penalty!"

"I ain't stickin' out that he sha'n't croak, mind ye," came the quick response. "I'd stand out strong ag'inst his bein' turned loose to tell all he's see'd an' heard in hyar; but when ye come to simmer it down to a fine pint, ma'am, thar's reason in all things, I reckon!"

"An end to all things, unless it's to the length of your tongue, pardner!" insinuated the cowboy, with growing disgust. "If you've got a better way to do the job, yet blind the trail, out with it, can't you?"

"It's plenty early, yet, cully," suggested the city thug. "I'm doin' more'n just chawin' wind, if you'll only think that way. This is a tougher job than you counted on, I do reckon!"

"I've rounded up more than one of his breed, and never made half this many bones over it, either," with a surly growl.

"That's all right, cully. Out on the range, an' hyar in town's two mighty different things. As for this duck, he's a dead stranger to me, but I know this much: he's showed up mighty thick with the police, and that—come a bit back this way, the both of ye!"

Drawing his present pals as far from their prisoner as he could without actually leaving the room, Zack Hinton spoke in rapid whispers for several minutes, doubtless giving an outline of the plans he had been shaping, yet speaking so guardedly that, with all his efforts, Doctor Dangerfield failed to catch so much as a single word.

But this time he knew that he could hardly hope to free himself from those bonds before the crisis should come, and knowing that his assassination was surely being agreed upon, he took the one frail chance that was left him: inflating his lungs to their utmost capacity, then uttering a clear, ringing call for help!

With savage cries and curses the thug and his pals sprung toward their prisoner, and while Zack Hinton put on the garrote, he hastily gave Ned Watson some instructions, which the cowboy was prompt in carrying out to the best of his ability.

A muffler was flung over the head of the surgeon, then Watson took the place of the cooler ruffian, who swiftly did the rest.

Half strangled as he was, unable to longer cry out, Doctor Dangerfield was quick to recognize the scent of chloroform as that muffler was partly lifted from over his face, for a hand to slip beneath it, bearing a wet sponge, which was pressed firmly over his lips and nostrils.

"Squirm all ye like, cully!" grimly said the city thug, as he held the drug in place. "It's a bitter pill, but it must be tuck! The tougher ye fight, the wuss it'll 'fect ye in the end, so—what's the use?"

It is anything but an easy task to completely chloroform a strong man, particularly against his will. The doctor, realizing what would almost certainly follow insensibility, fought with all his mental and physical powers against succumbing, but, of what avail? He *must* draw his breath, and each painful gasp only weakened his powers of resistance.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

TWICE Zack Hinton was forced to add fresh chloroform to the sponge to guard against anything like pure air reaching those laboring lungs, but each time he did this through Watson, himself keeping the sponge clamped tightly over both lips and nostrils.

It was a long and a desperate struggle, but at length the victory was won, and Doctor Dangerfield lay limp and seemingly lifeless in his chair.

So deathlike was his prostration that Josefa Gayferos was deceived into thinking her vengeance had been cheated, and for a few seconds Zack Hinton stood in mortal peril of his life.

By nimble dodging he escaped while hastily explaining that the doctor was as much a living man as one sleeping, and finally Josefa was convinced that her vendetta was still alive, her victim still at her fierce mercy.

"An' now the rest ought to be dead easy," asserted the thug, relieved of his bodily fears, yet scowling darkly as he glanced at the gleaming blade which the Mexican woman would persist in keeping ready for use at an instant's notice.

"If he don't wake up too mighty soon!"

"That's easy enough, too, cully; there's more left in the bottle, I reckon? And now—ye both caught on, didn't you?"

"You said drug him, then dump into the drink, the way I made it out, pardner," answered the cowboy.

"That's the ticket I'm votin', cully," with a nod of grim approval. "Shootin' makes too mighty much noise. Stickin'—*her* way!—leaves a muss that talks too mighty loud, an' isn't easy to wipe out. So—this is the peppergram, mates.

"You'll go look up a hack, cully, an'—"

"What's the matter with *your* going, pardner? You know the trails heap sight better'n I do."

Hinton hesitated a moment or two, scowling blackly as he reflected.

He knew that it would be wisest for him to perform that particular part of the work, since he needed a driver whom he could trust to act without taking notes for the future; but, could he trust the vicious tigress? If left with only Ned Watson to hold her hand in check, would she be able to refrain from butchering the man she hated so savagely?

Something of this showed upon his face, and Josefa was shrewd enough to read those dark lines, and eager for her vengeance, she spoke quickly:

"You need hold no fear, senor. I will

not harm the dog while you are away; by all the Holy Saints I make my oath!"

"All right, then!" with evident relief. "You'd be worse than crazy to do it, ma'am, when my way is so much slicker, an' so mighty much safer."

"Then you'll get the rig, while we wait here, pardner. And when you come back?"

"We'll tote this gent out, handlin' him like a high-roller who's been fightin' the bottle an' ketched an overdose—see?"

"The smell would give that away, though—faugh!"

"If we was fools 'nough to wait on the walk for anybody to come up, of course; but we'll look out for that," impatiently explained the burly ruffian. "And once safe in the hack, it's only a jolly drive down to the big bridge, an' then out by the middle—*dump!*"

A few further explanations were called for, but sufficient has been given here to explain the line of action marked out by the city crook, and shortly after, his movements hastened somewhat against his will by the others, who plainly were less accustomed to turning night into day, Zack Hinton left the house, going after the close hack essential to the murderous scheme his fertile brain had hatched up.

It did not take him long to procure the very assistance he deemed safest, knowing the town and its night-hawks so thoroughly, and leaving the driver's seat when yet a safe distance away from the building, with orders to follow after a bit unless a signal came to the contrary, Zack Hinton reached the place, to find all as he had left it.

The hack drew up close to the curb, and supporting the limp, nerveless figure of the drugged surgeon between them, the triad of crooks emerged from the building, crossing the pavement to the hack.

Then came an abrupt and totally unexpected change.

With stern commands to halt and give an account of themselves, several policemen dashed forward with drawn clubs ready for use in case of stubborn resistance.

Zack Hinton gave a warning cry, for he saw that it would be impossible to place their helpless prey into the hack and enter themselves, in time to elude the officers.

Josefa Gayferos was keen enough to realize the same thing, and with a vicious Spanish oath, her dirk flashed forth with a deadly thrust meant for the heart of the sinking surgeon, now let fall by both Zack and Watson.

There was no time for more than the single stroke, for already the policemen were almost within clubbing reach, and there was no telling how many other officers might be coming up; and with savage rage the smuggler's widow fled at top speed, the trio scattering to divide pursuit and so increase their individual chances of escape.

Doctor Dangerfield fell limply to the walk as the hackman whipped up his team in hurried flight, and two of the policemen were forced to stop lest they stumble over or trample upon his body. But the third man leaped over, keeping eyes upon a powerful shape now taking to the street, and calling out a stern warning to halt!

This was not obeyed, and after repeating it twice, the officer caught aim and fired a single shot.

No more was needed, for the city thug went down in a crippled heap!

The other fugitives caught the hack, and were out of sight by this time, so pursuit ended with the capture of Zack Hinton.

Striking a light, one of the officers recognized Doctor Dangerfield as having been with Chief Gowdy that day, and when his helpless condition was fairly understood, a call for the patrol wagon was sent in.

When the call was answered, the extent of Zack Hinton's injuries had been ascertained: a shattered leg, with a fair prospect for an amputation in order to save his worthless life.

Both victim and crook were conveyed to the Central in the same wagon, and as Chief Gowdy was still at his office, it is readily understood that Harlow Dangerfield did not lack for swift and tender attention.

For the third time Josefa Gayferos had made a failure in trying to reach the heart of the man against whom she had taken the never-dying vendetta, for her hasty stroke in the dark, delivered as Doctor

Dangerfield was in the act of falling, had done nothing worse than to rip a narrow slit in his vest, then the dagger-point being deflected by coming into sharp contact with his massive hunting-case watch.

But for a considerable length of time Chief Gowdy was apprehensive enough. That deathlike insensibility was so difficult to break up!

There was sufficient scent of chloroform clinging to his garments and issuing on his slow, faint breath, to explain the nature of the means used by the lawless party; but this was an unusual instance, thanks to the desperate fight the surgeon had made before succumbing.

Still, with an unimpaired heart-action, and perfect physical health, the police surgeon was willing to stake his reputation on eventually bringing the patient through all right; and when satisfied that he himself could do no further good, just then, Chief Gowdy paid a visit to the cell where the crippled crook was lying upon a cot, until other arrangements could be made in his case.

Suffering terribly though he was, Zack Hinton kept rigidly on his guard, and had but one story to tell: he was merely a modern instance of old dog Tray!

"I never knowed nothin' was crooked, boss," he reiterated as Chief Gowdy questioned him in hopes of learning all. "I was jest moggin' 'long yender way, when a couple o' folks axed me would I help 'em help a sick gent into the hack. An' when I done that—"

"Why did you run away, then?"

"Didn't the rest run? An' hain't that sort o' doin's mighty ketchin', boss?"

Nothing more satisfactory could be extracted from the fellow, and leaving him for the present, Chief Gowdy went back to where his old friend was gradually responding to the skillful efforts of the surgeon, although as yet unconscious.

"He's doing fully as well as could be expected, sir," reported the medical man, looking up from his labors with a bright smile. "I'll have him ready to ask you why so long a visage, chief, in less than another half-hour!"

This limit was extended by one-half, but before the hour was fully up, Doctor Danger gave a groan and an uneasy stir, his muscles knotting and his sinews stiffening like one engaged in a stubborn struggle.

"He's fighting it all over again, sir," whispered the surgeon, in explanation, then adding, as he rose to his feet: "He'll do, now, sir. I'd better go and look after the other patient."

Chief Gowdy was left alone with the reviving soldier, but his really strong anxiety was presently relieved in goodly measure, for Dangerfield opened his eyes, and even gave a faint, wan smile as he seemed to recognize that kindly face bending over his cot.

"Thank Heaven you're getting there, man, dear!" exploded the chief at this, and then Doctor Danger gave a convulsive start as though he would have sprung to his feet. "Don't you worry, Harlow. It's all right, and we've got the fellow who drugged you!"

"Hold him fast!" panted Dangerfield. "He did—he killed Gordon! Ask Norris—proof—on the porch—"

So far, then the Doctor Detective closed his eyes, dropping off in slumber that was too profound for easy breaking.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF A VENDETTA.

THAT slumber lasted without a break until after the new day had dawned, and when he had roused up sufficiently to recall all that he had undergone, Doctor Dangerfield himself was surprised to find no worse effects remaining.

And now, along about mid-forenoon, as the surgeon strode through the streets, heading for the Union Depot, only a dull headache remained to remind him of that desperate struggle against being drugged to insensibility, which was intended to carry him across the dividing line, into eternity.

Briskly as his feet moved, the surgeon's brain was working even more actively, and mainly anent the unsolved problem—the death of his old friend, Darius Gordon,

In company with Chief Gowdy, Dangerfield had visited the crippled ruffian, Zack Hinton, hoping to learn something more definite from his lips; but if the city thug was guilty of that bloody crime, he was wary enough to steer clear of each and every veiled snare they presented.

Chief Gowdy had been strongly impressed by the discoveries Doctor Dangerfield had made at the Gordon residence, and an hour had been agreed upon for their returning to the scene in company, to go over it all at their leisure; but even yet the head of the Metropolitan force would not agree with Dangerfield that Martin Bridgewater was wholly innocent.

Part of the troubled thought with which the surgeon was busy just now, concerned stray facts which, as yet, he had carefully kept from the chief; such as the wild, hysterical words let fall by Marian Bridgewater during that call of his at her residence, and the strangely excited talk of old Roger Quayle, who now seemed oddly anxious to fasten suspicion upon the son-in-law of his murdered master.

What did it all mean? Why did Marian Bridgewater accuse herself of the killing—whom? Surely not her own father? And yet—what other interpretation could be given these hysterical cries?

And Roger Quayle: at first he had denied the fact of his master having any callers on that fatal night. Later, he admitted that one who might possibly be Martin Bridgewater, had passed up the stairs. And now—could it be that he was seeking to shield another? And that other was—

Doctor Danger checked his ugly thoughts whenever they reached this point, telling himself he was a fool! But, just as often his too busy brain would go the rounds, to reach that same forbidden point!

He was still pondering over the riddle which had so unexpectedly fallen across his life-path, when he came in sight of the Union Depot, and then forced himself to recall what had brought him thither.

As a matter of course, his adventure with the smuggler's widow and her chosen aids, had done his garments no particular good, for while he was able to resist, the surgeon had fought with desperation against subjection.

The two men being of pretty much the same size and build, Chief Gowdy had furnished his old friend with a change of raiment, but as it was more than probable that his delayed trunk had reached its destination at last, the doctor was now on his way to reclaim his property.

The bustle and apparent confusion which naturally surrounds such a rendezvous of travel and traffic came very agreeably to the surgeon, just then. It gave him relief, since it helped to banish those haunting fears, those ugly thoughts, for the time being at least.

Not yet familiar with the locality, Doctor Danger was walking slowly along, glancing up at the various gilded signs, looking for the baggage department in preference to asking questions which would brand him as novice or as stranger in town.

Trains were coming in and going out; switch-engines were running briskly, with clanging bells and wheezy puffings or rapid pantings; men and women were hurrying to and fro, by fits and starts as the deep-pitched voice of the depot master called forth the trains and their principal stations; but then came a chorus of sharp cries, followed by a few seconds of almost breathless silence.

As by instinct Doctor Dangerfield looked in the right direction to see what so many others were beholding without the power to check or to hinder the almost inevitable tragedy.

Two trains were in motion, running in opposite directions, and as though still hoping to catch the departing train, a woman was falling directly in front of the steam-and-smoke-veiled engine of the other train.

Just how it happened, could only be surmised, but in all probability the poor creature must have slipped on the rail or the oil-soaked guards of oak; but be that as it may, she fell heavily across the metals when the pilot of that engine was only a few yards away.

The doctor was too far away to even offer

aid, but he saw a man, rough-clad and looking anything but a hero, dash forward and make a hurried grasp at that struggling shape.

The woman was partially lifted into his arms, but before he could spring ahead or turn back with his awkward burden, the pilot struck them both, tossing them aside to fall with ugly violence upon oaken planks and steel rails!

That terrible blow divided the pair, and the woman fell a few feet nearer to where the surgeon was starting forward with the cry of vain warning which passed so many other lips, and over her he bent, saying:

"I'm a surgeon—don't crowd, you people!"

The woman lay upon her face, and Doctor Dangerfield immediately slipped a hand beneath her motionless form to turn her over. And as he lifted that still quivering weight, he knew the truth: her neck was broken, else it would never hang with that strange limpness!

But it was not this dread truth that made the doctor turn so ghastly pale, shrinking back with widely opened eyes. He recognized that face, and from his paling lips came the faintly murmured words:

"Already! Josefa—her vendetta ended—by death!"

It was true: Josefa Gayferos lay there before him, dead, killed in her attempt to escape from the city where her arch-enemy was almost surely taking methods to save himself, and to bring her to justice!

Like one in a waking dream, Doctor Dangerfield caught one of the many questions which were showered upon him by those eager spectators, and the necessity of answering it, served to in good measure restore his scattered wits.

"There is nothing to be done; the woman is dead, and beyond mortal aid," he said, rising to his feet, but with eyes still fixed upon that face, plainly recognizable in spite of the blood and dust and disfiguring bruises received by that death-toss.

And only a few fleeting seconds before—full of life and vigor and—

Doctor Dangerfield shivered again, and shrunk away as a hand tapped his shoulder from behind, turning swiftly to note the uniform of the depot-master, who said:

"You're a doctor? Then this poor fellow needs you, I reckon, sir!"

The memory of that daring attempt to rescue an imperiled fellow-being returned to the surgeon and once more the professional instinct was awakened, and he more than willingly bore the depot-master company.

The man had been tossed to the other side of the track, and it was necessary to make a short detour before the injured person could be reached.

Before he had fairly gained his side, the doctor knew that a grave case was before him, and he swiftly muttered:

"Send in a call for an ambulance, for—"

"I've already turned it in, sir."

"Thanks. I'll do what I can until better skill comes to relieve me, of course," said Doctor Dangerfield, then kneeling by the side of the injured man, his professional eye rapidly registering the visible hurts.

A badly crushed arm, a fractured leg, and painful bruises; the latter mainly caused by his having been flung violently against one of the iron pillars which supported the rain or storm-sheds.

And here another surprise met the Doctor Detective, for, as he bent over that bleeding mass of humanity, he recognized one who had served as a private in his regiment, and even in his own particular company, Samuel Dobson by name.

The ex-soldier opened his eyes as those gentle hands began manipulating his injured limbs, and catching sight of the uniformed depot-master, he shrunk away, gasping:

"Don't—I didn't—I never shot—"

Doctor Dangerfield gave a start at this, and without his own volition, the name of the murdered stock-broker burst from his lips!

"I never—fore God, I never done it!" again panted the injured man, and with his sound arm he strove to repel those dimly seen shapes.

The doctor instinctively grasped that hand—how large, how coarsely shaped! And—those thick, stumpy fingers!

Then, as by magic, a mental panorama

flashed across his brain. He saw this man, coarse, brutal, passionate, almost constantly in trouble with his fellow-soldiers, or in disgrace with his officers—that while under the rigid rules of the army But now, free from discipline and restraints, what might he not have become?

"Dobson—Private Samuel Dobson!" he said, in clear tones.

The injured man opened his eyes, a look of glad recognition coming into his bruised face as he gazed upward.

"Doc Dangerfield! It is, isn't it?"

"And you are Private Dobson, yes!"

"I'm glad, mighty glad! Don't let—stay by me, Doc!"

"Unto the end, if it must come to that, Dobson," was the reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROOF-CLIMBER FOUND.

DOCTOR DANGERFIELD had his hands full for the next hour or more, but he proved competent to the emergency.

He made sure that Josefa Gayferos would not be lost to his tracing when the body should be removed from the depot, and he bore the injured man company to the hospital to which he was conveyed by the ambulance corps.

All that medical skill could do was brought into play, and Samuel Dobson was declared to have rather more than an even chance for his life, unless some as yet unsuspected internal injuries should develop.

It was quite late in the afternoon when Doctor Dangerfield found himself seated by the neat cot-bed where Dobson was resting, and directly opposite the surgeon was the erect form and grave face of Chief Gowdy.

This was not entirely through the wishes of Harlow Dangerfield, however, for there were sundry shades and shadows beginning to make themselves so prominent in this Gordon tragedy, that the Doctor Detective would greatly prefer going over all of the new ground without any other eye or ear witnesses by

But the depot-master, himself a member of the police force, had overheard those too significant words by the injured man, and as in duty bound, had reported the same to chief.

Dobson was both looking and feeling much stronger than one could have expected, knowing the nature of his injuries; but his constitution was wonderfully strong, and as yet amputation of his shattered arm had not been decided upon.

He seemed fairly overjoyed at recognizing Doctor Dangerfield, and had more than once recalled a fact forgotten until then by the surgeon: a daring rescue from Indians, when life and scalp both seemed fairly lost.

"Maybe I'd been better off if you hadn't taken the trouble and the risk, Doc," he was muttering, now, with the light of gratitude burning plainly in his eyes. "But, you *did* it, and so I'll open up it all to you, now you seem to want it that way, sir!"

Doctor Dangerfield flashed a half uneasy look over the cot to the chief of police, but Gowdy never moved a muscle. He was there on duty bent, and personal sympathy was entirely out of order; it was not "business."

Dobson caught that glance, and seemed to guess its full meaning, for the ghost of a smile flickered into and out of his countenance, after which he slowly uttered:

"Don't worry over that, Doc, for I don't mind. I'm bad enough, the Lord knows, but I never—never so bad as *that*, sir!"

"Then your best and safest way is to tell the whole story, my good fellow," suggested Chief Gowdy. "It's a candid fact that you are suspected of knowing something important concerning the killing of Darius Gordon, night before last. Now will you talk, Dobson?"

"Shall I, Doc?"

"I really think you'd better, Dobson. You let drop words while in agony down at the depot, which may cause you even worse trouble without you are able to fully explain them away. So, yes, you'd better!"

"All right, Doc. I'll do it for you, but—I never *did* savor any of that—of *his breed o' dogs!*"

The final words came in a husky whisper which was intended solely for the ears of his old regimental surgeon, and if Chief Gowdy caught that hardly complimentary allusion, nothing in his visage betrayed as much.

"I'll be more than glad to have you speak out, without reserve or evasion, Dobson; but, at the same time, don't forget that whatever you may say now will be remembered by both of us. And, it may even become necessary for us to repeat some parts of it, before the courts," said the surgeon to his patient.

"That's all right, Doc, and I expected it. Still, I'll keep my word to you, now I've passed it. Will I begin now, sir?"

"If you feel strong enough for the task, perhaps you'd better."

The surgeon tested the injured man's pulse with practiced touch, but found it nearly normal, showing far less of fever than he had dared hope for.

"Well, Doc, I'd be worse than a fool to try to lie to *you*," frankly began the ex-cavalryman. "You know I was a terrible bad pill even while in the service, and—"

"I never knew a fellow who had less fear for himself when in the fore-front of danger, Dobson!" generously interrupted the doctor.

"Or with less fear of the guard-house, Doc!" with a faint but clearly pleased smile as his sound arm moved enough to let his clumsy hand touch that of the surgeon. "That was the way I first came to know what a worthless devil I was, you see!"

"Well, thanks mainly to you, sir, I managed to serve my term through without coming to worse than guard-house, extra duty, or a bit of the buck-and-gag! And then—well, I *did* hate to break clean away from the only gentleman who ever treated me like I was a man, in place of a dog!"

"And I was sorry to see you leave the service, too, Dobson. You were beginning to sober down, and as a second term man—"

"I'd have been much better off? That's easy seen, Doc, looking at me now, as I lay here," with a short, bitter laugh. "But then—well, I *had* to have my fling, and, somehow, I couldn't do me full justice on that so long as I was within *your* eye range."

"I refused to re-enlist, then, as you know, Doc, and with my back pay burning a hole through my new trowsers, I skipped for town, and you jest bet your parade boots I had my high old fling, too!"

Again the injured man laughed, but there was precious little mirth in the sounds. Evidently his golden apples had turned to ashes between his lips.

"It's all too easy for you to guess what followed after, Doc, so what's the use in my wasting wind telling you the length and breadth of it all? I was my own master, as I kept telling myself, and being that, of course I had to play the ass to make it seem more real. It's a pretty tough test, this being turned loose from regimental discipline, Doc, to do just as the devil eggs you on! I *know*, for *I've been there!*"

"Pass all that by, Dobson, and come down to the present," urged the surgeon.

"Tiring you out, eh? Well, Doc, as you're the only gentleman who ever looked at or treated me as though I was a foot higher than a mangy cur, I can't help making a few excuses in advance, just to show how a fellow *will* slide down-hill, when there's no true friend by to hinder. But, that's enough of that!"

"When a fellow is going down hill all the time, Doc, it's not long until he comes mighty near the bottom! And so it was with me when, one day last month, I happened to be nigh when a gentleman flashed up a great wad of greenbacks, to pay for a magazine he was buying."

"The devil it was, I reckon, who made me follow the man as he left, and I never lost sight of him until he was safely housed under his own roof-tree. And that gent was Darius Gordon, sir!"

"Last month, you say, Dobson?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I had a few dollars left, and it was mainly because I hadn't anything else to do that I followed Gordon. As Heaven hears me now, sir, I never once thought of harming him, or of taking away the money he flashed up so recklessly!"

"That is not very much like Darius Gordon," quietly said Gowdy.

"All the same, it *was* him," retorted Dob-

son, with a passing frown, but then returning his gaze to the face of his former friend, the surgeon. "And while I went away without doing any mischief, *then*, I couldn't help thinking more or less often about what a fine thing it'd be to have all the money a fellow could squander! And so—this nasty bit of trouble came upon me!"

"You went back to Gordon's house, Dobson?"

"Half-dozen times, Doc," with a touch of recklessness coming into his tones. "And long before this week came 'round, I knew pretty well how old Gordon lived, and just how he was used to spend his evenings."

"Then the time came when I was flat broke, and no prospect of getting any money ahead of me. And so—well, I made up my mind that as I was bound for the devil anyway, the quicker I got there the better!"

"I went out to the Gordon place, and having ciphered it all out in advance, I hadn't much trouble in getting there. I knew only old Quayle was likely to be on the place, and watching my chance, I climbed up on the roof of the porch, where I bunkered down under cover of the vines, meaning to wait until the right time, then force an entrance through one of the upstairs windows."

"What made you wait so long there under the vines, Dobson?"

"How do you know I did, Doc?" asked the other, with an odd expression coming into his blackened eyes.

"I saw where you had lain in hiding, and saw that you had remained there long enough to wear out one big chew of plug, and to take another," quietly explained the Doctor Detective. "I saw where you spat, and saw by the crushed leaves and young shoots that you were there long enough to grow so weary of waiting you had to change position several times."

"When a man is waiting on such a dangerous business, Dobson, he can sit still for a mighty long time. So—that's why I asked you—what caused you to wait so long before acting?"

Dobson drew a long breath at this, then responded:

"That's what sent me to the depot, Doc. I knew *you'd* take hold of the case, and I was afraid of your terribly keen eyes. For—"

"Why did you do it, Dobson? What made you shoot Darius Gordon dead in his tracks?" sternly demanded the Doctor Detective.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT DOBSON SAW AND HEARD.

UP to this point Doctor Dangerfield had held himself well in check, but now he broke forth with an emphasis which in part betrayed the internal excitement he was laboring under.

It seemed to him that Samuel Dobson, now that the supreme moment was reached, was flinching from the truth, where the whole truth could but condemn him before the eyes of man, law and Heaven.

The injured man was shrewd enough to recognize something of this, for he flinched from that blazing gaze, the heavy growth of hair about his mouth twitching and betraying his agitation.

Only for the space of a single breath, however. Then his eyes boldly met those of the Doctor Detective, and in even stronger tones than any he had been able to summon to his aid since that interview began, Dobson said:

"I never harmed Gordon, sir. As true as the sun shines over our heads this day, sir, I never fired that shot!"

"But you know who did do the killing, don't you?" questioned Chief Gowdy, at this juncture.

The powerful interest which he felt in rightly solving this riddle, fully as much in a private sense as from a public point of view, urged the official to put that query, but the words were still warm upon his lips when he saw that he had injured rather than helped those interests.

Instead of flinching, as he had from the one man in all the world whom he both respected and feared, Dobson scowled blackly upon the head of police, growling just above his breath:

"Oh, you go off the dump! I'm not talking to *your* order, mind!"

"Go easy, Dobson!" spoke up the surgeon, once more winning control of his emotions. "This gentleman might treat you a vast deal worse, and your own words, not to mention actions, would fully justify him in doing so."

"I'm telling *you*, sir, not *him*," sulkily protested the insubordinate cripple. "Either he buttons lip, or I will—and that's flat!"

A smile curled Chief Gowdy's gray mustaches, and he silently nodded across the cot to his old friend. That told Dangerfield to never mind him, but to press the point home, now he had made a beginning.

"You say you did not harm Darius Gordon, Dobson?" asked the surgeon after a brief period for collecting his thoughts.

"I say it, and I'm ready to swear that same way, Doc," came the instant response. "Do you know who *did* shoot him, then?"

Doctor Dangerfield turned a shade paler as he asked this question, for he was beginning to dread what fate held in store.

Until now, he had literally forced himself to believe what he so infinitely preferred: that Darius Gordon had come to his death by the hand of the roof-climber, whoever that person might prove to be. But now, a keen judge of human faces and human nature, he began to feel that Samuel Dobson was not the assassin!

Wild, reckless, wicked though the cavalry man had been in days gone by, he had never been branded liar. True, he himself admitted that he had gone rapidly to the bad since leaving the service; but did not that very admission help sustain his army record as a truth-teller?

Had they two been alone together, it might have been easier, but on the other side of the cot sat the representative of law, and whatever Dobson had to say, he must hear as well.

"I don't know just *who* it was, Doc," presently came the deliberate response. "I can't tell you *that*, for sure!"

Chief Gowdy suddenly leaned forward so that their eyes might meet, and in cold tones he spoke:

"Talk along the chalk-line, my fine fellow, unless you're really aching to do your own chances further harm. There is almost proof enough against you now to knot the rope; weaken it if you can, Dobson."

Few criminals had sufficient hardihood to face down the chief when he took that tone and wore that calm yet masterful look. Dobson shrunk away as far as his injuries would permit, but gave a faint gasp of relief as Doctor Dangerfield gently placed a hand upon his feverish brows.

"The gentleman is right, Dobson, but if you'd rather answer me than him, look this way, please. So! My old roisterer of the —th never was able to prevaricate when we met eye to eye!"

"May the devil claim me, Doc, if I'll lie to you now, either!" cried the ex-cavalryman, rallying from the disagreeable shock those other eyes had given him. "I tell *you* honest and true, sir! I didn't hurt the old gent, nor can I tell you the name of the fellow who did shoot him!"

The doctor saw that his man was speaking naked truth, now, and the chief of police was almost as firmly convinced.

With his secret dread in a measure relieved by these words, Doctor Dangerfield spoke again:

"Take it your own way, Dobson, but tell it all. If you have nothing to fear for yourself, then you need have no scruples about making full and perfect confession."

"I've told you the blackest part of the whole business so far as it touches me, sir," declared the other. "I freely admit that I went there to steal; that I climbed up to the roof of the porch, meaning to break into the house by way of the second-story windows, and then crib all I could get away with of value."

"This is my confession, sir. I meant to steal, but I never once thought of shedding blood in order to win the boodle!"

"I believe you, Dobson. Go on, please."

"Well, sir, I was there on the roof, hunkering down under cover of those vines, for full an hour before sunset. For one thing, I wanted to be where I could see the gentleman when he first came to that favor-

ite room of his. Then, if he stowed away his wad, or had any secret hiding-place for it, I could catch on, and so save trouble and time. You understand, don't you, sir?"

Doctor Dangerfield bowed his comprehension, and Dobson resumed:

"Well, Doc, I was there when Gordon came, and I knew when he struck the light. Then he came to my end of the room, just as I was about to crawl forward to watch him, and raised the window; felt too warm, or the room was too close, I reckon!

"Well, that checked me a bit. One of the boards *would* give a little creak whenever I moved much, and I was afraid others might be still worse out of fix. And so I stopped under cover until it should grow still darker."

"Still, I could see that Gordon was seated at his desk, close by the window, where he appeared to be looking over papers and writing; anyway, sir, that's the way it looked to me then."

"I was growing terribly weary with that sort of waiting, before anything happened to work a change; then I caught sounds of voices over yonder in that room, and as they grew louder, until they sounded something like fighting-talk, I crawled out of my hole, and moved along until I could catch a tolerably fair squint into the room, through the shutters: they were canted, you understand?"

Again Doctor Dangerfield contented himself with nodding, and after a brief wait, Dobson resumed:

"At first I couldn't see much besides the old gentleman, for his chair was right in front of the window, but then, as he turned more squarely to face the other talker, I saw who it was."

"Who was it, then?" asked Chief Gowdy, quickly.

The roof-climber looked doubtfully that way, then turned his eyes toward the surgeon. Doctor Dangerfield, hardly daring to trust his own voice just then, nodded for the ex-cavalryman to answer the question.

"'Twas Martin Bridgewater, sir."

"Are you dead sure of that, Dobson? Remember that what you say now may have to be repeated under oath," warned the chief.

"I'm dead sure, sir. Of course him and a fellow like me don't mix, but where doors swing as wide for a poor devil as for a tony high-roller—and there *are* some doors that do, if you *are* chief of police!"

"I know that, Dobson," with a smile as he caught the thinly disguised taunt. "And you can take oath the man who was quarreling with Darius Gordon, was none other than Martin Bridgewater?"

"Wish I was as sure of heaven as I am of *that*, sir!" with grim assurance in his tone.

"And you say the two gentlemen were quarreling together?"

"It sounded mightily like it, anyway!"

"What were they quarreling about?"

"That's just what I didn't have time to make out, precisely, sir," answered the man, after a barely perceptible hesitation. "But I know the row was over a woman of some sort, and—"

"Take time for thinking it all over, Dobson," interposed Doctor Dangerfield, with a degree of nervousness such as rarely marked his voice or his actions. "Remember that much may—take careful thought before you say more, my good fellow!"

"It isn't much more I can tell, doctor, even if I wanted to," declared the cavalryman. "The fact is, I was badly scared for myself, and I'd have left the place before then, only for one thing."

"What thing was that?" asked Chief Gowdy.

"You haven't forgotten how mighty bright the moon shone that night, have you?" asked Dobson, seemingly trying to evade a ticklish point.

"What has that got to do with the shooting, man alive?"

"Maybe much, maybe little, but I reckon you'll never be any the wiser without you give me a chance to tell," sulkily muttered the fellow, plainly betraying his dislike for the inquisitor.

"You were afraid of being discovered; is that it?" asked Doctor Dangerfield, in more soothing tones.

"Just that, sir! I saw some person on the watch as it was!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIDDLE UNREAD.

THE two inquisitors interchanged glances, then the head of police nodded for Doctor Dangerfield to press the point after his own fashion, as the one more likely to win perfect confidence from this difficult witness.

"Watching *you*, do you mean, Dobson?"

"Well, maybe not just *that*, unless he'd very recently caught a glimpse of me yonder; but,—you remember that big white-elm tree standing across the road from the Gordon house, Doc?"

"I recall it, yes. Why?"

"Well, when I was waiting, trying to hear what those two gents had to talk so mighty busy about, I happened to look over yonder way, and I caught sight of something dark—thicker than a shadow, you know, and mighty like the size and build of a man."

"Then, when it looked as if a row was going to break loose inside, and I happened to think how nasty it might pan out for me if I was caught right there—well, I'd have beaten a retreat in great shape, only I was afraid that spy, watch, guard, whatever the shadow might be, would jump me, too mighty sudden!"

"Did you think of it's being a policeman, Dobson?"

"That's just what I *did* reckon, boss, for an honest fact! Only for that I'd have racked out before the row broke, but—well, I was afraid to run the risk, sir!"

"Yet you added to that risk by creeping up to the lighted window, you said," reminded the surgeon.

"I know it, sir. When things began to grow hotter *inside*, I forgot what might be simmering on the *outside*, and so—I was peeking in through those open slats, then, when—the shot was fired that killed old Gordon!"

Although the army surgeon knew that some such declaration must be nigh at hand, he shrunk visibly from the words when they did come; but not so Chief Gowdy.

Believing that the solution of that dark riddle was now at hand, he asked with swift eagerness:

"Did you see the shot fired? Where was the man, and how was he standing in relation to Gordon?"

"What man?"

"Bridgewater, of course! Didn't you say *he* was there quarreling with Gordon? Where were they when the shot was fired? How were they standing?"

"I didn't see them, sir," declared the witness.

Both Gowdy and Dangerfield showed their disappointment at this totally unexpected answer, and the surgeon repeated:

"You didn't see them?"

"No, I didn't see them, for I wasn't looking that way when the shot was fired."

Chief Gowdy leaned forward to catch that shifting eye, then sternly spoke again:

"Careful, my fine fellow, unless you want us to believe you've been dealing in lies from start to finish. Didn't you say you saw Martin Bridgewater fire the shot that killed Darius Gordon?"

"Devil a bit, for *he never shot him at all!*" boldly declared Dobson, conquering that brief fear, and squarely meeting the gleaming eyes of his inquisitor.

"You mean it, man?" demanded the doctor, no longer trying to mask his emotions. "Look me in the eye and—it's true, Gowdy! I can read his brain as you'd read a book! Bridgewater *is* innocent of that crime, as I've maintained all along!"

The surgeon was undoubtedly in sober earnest as he made this assertion, but Gowdy shook his head, face wearing a puzzled, even annoyed expression just then.

"If Bridgewater didn't, *who did*?"

"You can answer that, Dobson?" sharply demanded the doctor.

"I only wish I could, sir, but—how can I?" muttered the man, his pale face plainly showing how severely this prolonged questioning was tasking his remaining powers.

"Didn't you say you saw the shot fired?"

"So I say it over, sir," with an increase of emphasis. "I was close to the window, where the lights came through the slats, as I told you before. And I'd clean forgotten all about the fellow I glimpsed down near the tree, I was so curious to find out just what those gents were quarreling about."

"But before I could fairly catch on, Doc, I heard a shrill whistle come from toward that tree, and as I turned my head to look that way, I saw the blaze of a gun or a pistol. And—that was the shot that killed old Gordon!"

Unless this was all a carefully prepared tale to clear his own shoulders of a hanging crime, Samuel Dobson firmly believed his account was true, and that here lay solved the mystery which had, until now, surrounded the death of the wealthy stock-broker.

Doctor Dangerfield seemed willing to accept that explanation, possibly because of late he had come to fear a far worse solution of that mysterious murder, but it was different with Chief Gowdy.

Knowing nothing of the ex-soldier's peculiarities, he had from the outset kept on the lookout for lies and evasions in order to lessen the peril which those half-crazed words had brought before this fellow's shrewd wits. All this *might* be veritable, but—it must be proved by other testimony than *his*, first!

"You say *that* shot killed Gordon, but how do you *know*?" came his first question after that startling declaration.

"Didn't I see the flash, and wasn't it pointed right our way?"

"You merely guess at that, don't you?"

"No sir! Guess be blowed! I can *prove* it, to the surgeon's satisfaction, if not to yours. And *he's* the one I'm talking to, not *you*!"

With almost childish impatience the injured rover turned again toward the one man on earth whom he loved and trusted, then added:

"I saw the shot fired, and I can swear the shot came straight for the window I was squatting in front of, too! I heard the report, but just before that came, I felt the wind of the bullet, and felt it cut through my beard—you can see where it broke off some of the hairs, Doc!"

His sound hand touched that particular portion of his beard; full, dense, not uncomely, though of a dull brick-red color.

The doctor bent lower, making the examination as Dobson plainly desired. He found a place where a number of hairs had been cut out or broken short off, but of course he could not swear that this had been done by a pistol—or a gun-shot.

"It *may* have been so, chief," he said, in answer to the inquiring gaze from that quarter. "And if Dobson says that *was* the actual way of it—"

"I'll make my oath to that on the Bible, doctor!"

"Then I believe the bullet *did* break those hairs," quietly added the surgeon, sinking back in his seat again.

Chief Gowdy tugged dubiously at his gray mustaches, his eyes showing that this phase of the case was far from satisfactory to him. Even in the face of Dangerfield's firm belief in this fellow's truth, he could not help doubting that strange tale.

"And you can swear that the same shot killed Darius Gordon, of course?" he asked, half mockingly, after a brief silence.

"No I don't, can't, *won't*!" sulkily exploded the witness. "For one thing, I didn't stop to look, and wouldn't even if I'd thought any one had caught that bit of lead!"

"You fled, then, Dobson?" asked the doctor.

"I did just *that*, sir! I took it a stray policeman had sighted me up there, as I stuck head in front of that light—curse me for a natural-born fool!"

"Never mind that, Dobson. Go on. You—did what?"

"Ran to the end of the roof—"

"Which end, if you remember?"

"The end toward the West, sir."

"You were nearer the other, weren't you?"

"Yes, but I remembered that a path led to a side door which was very often used by both Quayle and Gordon. I thought they'd make a break out that way to see what the shooting meant, and so—I took the other end, for choice!"

"You stumbled as you struck ground, didn't you?"

"And caught on my hands, yes," assented Dobson, but asking no questions. "Then I

ran away, and if any chase was made, it never came nigh enough to scare me, much!"

"Didn't you hear any other shot at or near the house, then?"

"No, sir. If there was any, I was too badly frightened to notice it. I never knew, until I heard some fellows talking it over, next day, that any one had been hurt by that one shot, either."

"I knew about how it must be, but thinking no one could even suspect that *I* had part in the affair, I went over that way, and—well, I saw *you* on the porch-roof, Doc, and then I reckoned I'd best light out for safer quarters."

"That was yesterday, Dobson, and this forenoon—how was it you didn't get away before?"

"Hard luck, and lack of scads, sir! I tried to make an honest raise, for I'd had a bit too much of the other sort! I failed, and then went down to the Union, hoping to steal a ride. I saw that woman slip, and of course I tried to save her. Instead—this ends all!"

With his voice choking, Dobson turned his face and buried it in his pillow, silent sobs shaking his injured person.

CHAPTER XXV.

COWARDICE, OR GUILT?

DOCTOR DANGERFIELD placed a soothing hand upon that head, at the same time shaking his own toward Chief Gowdy.

Up to this moment the ex-cavalryman had exhibited a nerve and degree of strength wonderful in a man so seriously injured, and that he had given way at last, only went to prove that further excitement would not only be cruel, but actually dangerous to his chances for life.

The police officer fully realized all this, yet, like a thoroughbred hound, he was loth to break off the trail just as it seemed at its hottest.

"Now's the time, Dangerfield," he said, in low tones. "Another such chance may never offer itself, and if we let this slip—"

Doctor Dangerfield rose to his feet and passing around the cot, placed a hand upon Gowdy's shoulder gravely muttering:

"No more, sir! We've learned all there is to find here, and any further attempt would be as shameful as useless. Will you take my word, as a physician, that Dobson is really unable to bear more, now?"

Those eyes said even more than that tongue, and for once in his life Septimus Gowdy permitted the will of another to bear down his own judgment.

"If you put it in *that* light, doctor, of course I have nothing more to say. Shall I wait for you, or—"

"Please wait. I'll join you in a minute or two."

Those minutes were spent by Doctor Dangerfield in calming and trying to encourage the ex-cavalryman, and it was yet another proof of his remarkable magnetism that even in that brief space of time, he succeeded in cheering Dobson, greatly, leaving him much better prepared to fight for his life than he had been at any time since being hurt.

Rejoining Chief Gowdy, Doctor Danger had nothing to offer until the hospital was cleared and they were walking slowly along a comparatively deserted street; then he said, almost fervently:

"I never *could* make it seem true that Martin Bridgewater was guilty of this crime, but now—thank heaven *you* must begin to see *so* much in the same light, old friend!"

"Who told you all that, Dangerfield?"

Dryly spoke the officer, and Doctor Danger gave a half-nervous start as he flashed a look of inquiry into that gaunt visage, just now full of a half-sneer, half-smile.

"Who told—you heard what Dobson said, Gowdy?"

"Yes, and I would have heard still more, only for your putting on the embargo. What of it?"

"Surely he proved—"

"How much? That he didn't *see* Gordon shot, even if you take every word he uttered for gospel; and that is asking just a bit too much of *my* credulity, Dangerfield."

"I'd stake my reputation on Dobson's truthfulness, Gowdy!"

"I've met up with some reckless plungers,

Harlow, but you can give the wildest one of the lot both odds and a beating!"

The doctor flung out a hand with impatient vigor, seemingly not thinking it worth while to argue that particular point further with one who so stubbornly refused to even listen to cool reason.

"Time will show which one of us has the best of it, Septimus, but—there is one thing you surely *can't* get over: the innocence of Martin Bridgewater, so far as the killing of Darius Gordon is concerned!"

Again that grimly skeptical smile showed itself, but in smooth, even tones the chief of police asked:

"Why are you so dead set on proving that fellow innocent, Dangerfield? After he worked you such bitter—"

Chief Gowdy broke off abruptly as the sinewy fingers of his friend closed upon the arm nearest him. The doctor's face flushed hotly, then turned pale again, but fortunately there were no others near enough to take curious note of his strong emotions, just then.

"You'd ought to be able to guess, Gowdy," Dangerfield uttered, in low tones, without any further attempt at disguising his feelings. "It's for *her* sake—all for her sake, man!"

"She'd be a mighty sight better off without him, and you know it, old man," grimly declared the other.

"For *her* sake, I tell you!" repeated the doctor, in goodly measure regaining his self-control. "Knowing as you do, how closely we were connected in those days gone by, you ought to know I'd gladly suffer for the sake of sparing *her* suffering?"

"I do know you're just fool enough, for a solid fact, Harlow!"

The words sounded almost contemptuously angry, but those eyes were moist, and that palm warm in his grip. For a few seconds the two friends faced each other, palm to palm and eye to eye; then they remembered where they were, and once more walked slowly onward, showing little outward signs of unusual emotions for the edification of who might see.

"It hadn't ought to surprise you so mighty much, Gowdy," Doctor Dangerfield said further. "I never really loved but one woman: Marian Gordon; and I never expect to love another; but I *did* love her, and I still love her with all my heart and soul!"

"I know it, Harlow, and that's what gets over me: why you should keep fighting so hard to hold fast that ugly barrier between you two!"

The doctor flinched at this, but forced his tones to steadiness as he made answer:

"You will understand even *that*, Gowdy, if you'll take time enough to think it all over. For now—this is what I mean, then: Mrs. Bridgewater, as *his* wife, and Gordon's daughter, is fated to suffer enough without having bitter black shame cast upon the name she now bears."

"But if that shame can't be hindered, Dangerfield?"

"It surely *can*, since Bridgewater is guiltless."

"But, is it so certain he is *not* guilty of the killing?"

"You heard what Dobson said, didn't you?"

"Of course, and part of that saying proved Martin Bridgewater was quarreling with Gordon at the time that pistol-shot was fired."

"Fired by some person on the ground, outside the house, remember."

"Unless Dobson lied, yes. But, if so, and if Bridgewater didn't shoot at the same instant, why was it left to chance for discovery? Look at it in this light for a moment, Dangerfield, can't you?"

Doctor Danger gave an uneasy gesture, but said nothing. Apparently this was a point difficult to handle, from his side of the question.

Just as plainly did Chief Gowdy feel his advantage, but his voice was as grave as his face when he spoke again:

"I don't like to crowd you too tight into a corner, old fellow, but when it comes to this—see? Even if you take Dobson's word for gospel, and give Martin Bridgewater full benefit of this account, how does he stand?"

"He ran away without helping his stricken father-in-law, or making the slight-

est attempt to catch his slayer! Would an innocent man act after this fashion, Dangerfield?"

"Certainly not! but there are degrees of guilt, Gowdy," earnestly argued the doctor. "I can't make it seem possible that Bridgewater could or would murder Gordon, even without the statement given us by Sam Dobson."

"A fellow who saw he had to clear himself of the crime!"

"A man who could no more lie while looking me in the eye, than you would," quietly but positively asserted doctor Danger. "But about Martin Bridgewater: call him a moral coward, if you like, but that is the full extent of his guilt in this case, I am confident."

"Oh, you're too infernally confident, and always in the wrong direction!" exploded the chief, unable longer to hold it back.

"Time will tell which one of us is taking the correct view of it all," came the grave, composed reply. "Bridgewater is a coward, morally if not physically. I feel confident that he did not harm Gordon, but he may have feared to raise the alarm, knowing that they had just been quarreling with each other."

"Well, right or wrong, Dangerfield, his taking to actual flight early in the morning after that killing, is hardly calculated to strengthen faith in his innocence."

Doctor Danger gave a start at this, the first intimation to that effect which had come his way. But a single glance into the face of Chief Gowdy assured him those were not random words.

"Bridgewater has left town, then?"

"On an early morning train, yesterday, yes," confirmed the chief. "I found it out before you were in condition for hearing, else I'd have told you all about it before now."

"Then—you have sent after him?" hesitatingly asked the surgeon, his face betraying serious discomposure of mind.

Chief Gowdy smiled slightly before making answer.

"It was a lucky bit of chance work, you see. A gentleman was running out a few miles into the country, and took that train; the Missouri Pacific. Of course he hadn't heard of the killing at Gordon's but he knew Bridgewater, and saw with surprise that he paid his fare on the train, in place of showing pass or giving ticket."

"He spoke of it, too, after a bit, and Bridgewater passed it off by saying he had barely caught the train as it was. Then, when he heard of the killing, he came direct to me and told what he had seen."

"And you?"

"Jumped at the clue, of course, but lost it nearly as soon. The conductor who took Bridgewater's cash fare was hurt in an accident at Kansas City that same trip, and was taken to the hospital. As no one but he could say where Bridgewater paid his passage to, I've sent a good man to interview him."

"As for your blind trust in him, I'll say just this: Bridgewater can only be fairly cleared of murder, by the discovery of the real criminal!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER THEORY EXPLODED.

DOCTOR DANGER made no answer to these crisply uttered sentences, but walked along by the side of his companion, head bowed and eyes downcast.

Why should he fight longer on behalf of one who seemed doing all he possibly could to fasten the conviction of black, cowardly guilt upon himself?

Why could he not withdraw, and with folded hands watch for the ending of this tragedy? Surely no man could blame him for taking such a course? No woman—

Ay! there was the rub!

The only woman he ever had, or ever could love, was that moral coward's wife! If he suffered, rightly or mistakenly, through his own clumsy efforts at blinding his trail, what of her?

Terribly shaken already by the shocking death of her father, the only blood relative death had left her so long, how could her proud spirit survive such another crushing stroke?

How much longer these gloomy musings might have lasted will never be known, only for the action of Chief Gowdy, who came to a halt, saying quietly:

"This is my way, Dangerfield. Business calls me to the office, but if you have anything else—*have you*, though?"

"There is my trunk," hesitatingly said the surgeon, conquering that start which came through his being so suddenly recalled to the present. "Of course I forgot all about that, when I recognized Dobson and—the woman!"

"Of course there is no mistake about its being the woman, Harlow?"

"It was Josefa, widow of Vincente Gayferos."

"It's good-luck to you, old man, heartless though that may sound when one remembers that death called it forth. The only thing lacking now is that cow-puncher!"

"Your men are on the watch for him, of course?"

"With the best description I could [make out from your words, yes. Then you'll not come with me?"

"Not just now, Gowdy. I'll see you again, though, and if nothing happens to prevent, or to render it useless—well, never mind!"

Breaking off thus abruptly, Doctor Danger turned sharply away, seeing nothing of the grimly quizzical smile with which the chief of police watched him for a few seconds.

Whether intentionally or not, Doctor Danger had turned off at an angle pointing most directly for the Union Depot; but he did not pursue this course for long. Scarcely was he out of sight of Chief Gowdy, than he turned again, now hurrying in the direction of the Gordon residence.

In spite of those musings of which a fair sample has been given the reader, Harlow Dangerfield was still resolute in fighting to clear from suspicion of murder the rival who had done so much toward ruining his happiness for life.

Knowing as he did that Chief Gowdy was obstinately holding to the actual guilt of Martin Bridgewater, in spite of the evidence given by Sam Dobson, Doctor Danger was in haste to put that testimony to the touch, and the rapidly waning day told him he had little time to waste unless he wished darkness to overtake him before that test was complete.

Nothing worth recording occurred during that brisk walk, and Doctor Danger soon came in sight of the Gordon place, now growing very familiar to his eyes, thanks to the strange manner in which he had become entangled in this black riddle.

"But the solution is surely at hand, now!" flashed through his mind as he passed into the grounds, then gave a nod to the policeman, who still remained on duty there at the front of the building.

Walking along the little path which rounded the east end of the woodbine-covered porch, Doctor Dangerfield entered at the side door, mention of which had been made by Samuel Dobson as an excuse for his leaping from the opposite end of the piazza roof.

The doctor saw that Roger Quayle was lying upon the lounge, face partially hidden in the ruffled chintz pillow; but as the old man made no sign of seeing or hearing him, the surgeon passed softly through the room, into the spacious hall, then mounted the carpeted stairs.

"I'll see the old fellow later on, perhaps," decided the doctor, his eyes glowing through the gloom with almost painful brightness. "But, for just now, I'd rather cipher it all out by myself!"

Yet he hesitated for a brief space before opening the door which gave admittance to the long apartment in which Darius Gordon had come by his death.

Why should that be, if his confidence in both Dobson and Bridgewater was so strong?

Pushing the door open, Doctor Dangerfield crossed the threshold. As he had done on a prior occasion, so he now turned the key in its wards, thus making sure of complete privacy, unless he saw fit to admit another to the room.

Pausing barely long enough to assure himself that nothing had been disturbed since his last visit, the army surgeon once

again produced that bullet-pierced calendar, which he had taken care to transfer when he shifted his garments, and hanging it in place to the gasalier, he glanced once more around the walls.

There was the oil-painting by means of which he had been able to trace the line taken by the fatal bullet after its bloody work, and at an equal distance from the other corner at that end of the room, hung the second of the triad: all kindred subjects, from the same skilled brush.

The third picture hung over the door through which he had recently entered, but Doctor Dangerfield was interested in only the one picture, just then: that with the bullet-hole through it.

Satisfied that nothing had been changed since he last stood within those four walls, the investigator turned toward the other end of the room, and lifted the heavy sash; then, canting the slats of the wooden blinds, he looked forth to refresh his memory as to—

A sharp exclamation broke from his lips as he made a truly startling discovery.

The white-elm tree was plainly visible, for the sun was just setting, casting a rosy yet yellowish glow over the surroundings; but, while it was plainly possible for a man standing at or near that tree to fire a shot which might enter that window, and even strike a person standing very much as Dangerfield had ciphered out Darius Gordon surely must have been standing when that shot was fired, the bullet continuing at the same angle, would have crossed the room at an exactly contrary angle to the actual line as made out by the Doctor Detective!

This discovery fairly stunned the doctor for a brief space. This seemed to flatly contradict the tale told by Sam Dobson, or else all his carefully worked out proofs were worse than naught!

"It couldn't—Dobson was not lying, but—if true, how could—*ha!*" and with another startling idea, Doctor Dangerfield stooped lower to unfasten the catches which retained the shutters in place, flinging them wide open with a force which sent an echo throughout the building.

"Mightn't that shot have struck the window-casing with sufficient force to deflect it far enough for taking that carefully studied out line?" was the question which the doctor now asked himself; and it was in hopes of proving his theory, that he hurriedly climbed through the window-opening and stepped out upon the piazza roof.

There was a very narrow margin allowed him, according to this solution of that death riddle; unless that bullet had touched the painted casing within the limits of a foot, up or down, on that particular side, glancing off at the right angle would be simply impossible.

And, look as carefully as he might, Doctor Danger failed to find anything which could possibly be accepted as the mark of a glancing bullet, although he searched from top to the bottom of that side of the window-casing.

Had Dobson been lying, as Chief Gowdy more than insinuated? Or, had those other bullet-marks been a misleading snare to his eyes?

Neither alternative could be readily accepted by the Doctor Detective, and this puzzling change in the situation fairly dazed him for the immediate moment.

His eyes roving aimlessly about, were suddenly caught by a small mark on the opposite casing, close to the edge, yet piercing the painted wood cleanly, leaving no signs of a glance or a graze. And, now that Doctor Dangerfield looked more closely, he saw there was no mistake: it was the print of a shot, and when he hastily drew his penknife and opened its smallest blade to insert in that hole, he felt it touch lead!

Bending still closer, the Doctor Detective fairly caught his breath as he noted something more: two slightly curled hairs, coarse of texture, and decidedly red as to color!

It all came back to him, then: the story told by Sam Dobson, and how he felt the lead give his beard a sharp tug, showing the severed hairs as further evidence!

Leaving these hairs still fastened to the wood, Doctor Danger knelt down and held his head like one cautiously peering in at the window, much as Dobson must have done when that shot was fired. And, turning his

head to look over the way, at that tree, Doctor Dangerfield saw that this almost positively was the mark of that shot!

He rose to his feet with repressed emotion, for while this sufficiently proved the truth of Dobson's account, it just as surely proved the impossibility of that shot having killed Darius Gordon.

The doctor stepped inside the room again, feeling still further from the end than at any time since beginning the investigation.

The mystery was still unsolved.

How had Darius Gordon come by his death-wound?

CHAPTER XXVII.

ROGER QUAYLE DISBURDENS.

As though still unable to accept the new phase which his latest investigations was putting upon the case, Doctor Danger paused when inside the room, glancing out toward the white-elm tree from whence Sam Dobson swore the shot came, then turning his eyes toward the further end of the long room, where the three paintings were still visible. Against one of them showed that bullet-marked calendar, but it was the one at the opposite side of the room.

If that telltale bullet had only been imbedded in the frame!

"Some one might have shifted the pictures, but—not now! And the bullet in the casing, with those red hairs! *That* shot could not have done the deed, then—who killed Darius Gordon?"

With each seeming step in advance, that mystery only grew the deeper, the riddle more profound!

And—if he was indeed free from all guilt, why had Martin Bridgewater shown such haste in leaving the city? Why had he taken such care to leave no plain record behind of that seeming flight?

And then, in spite of his efforts to banish it, came the ugly memory of those hysterical words spoken by Marian Bridgewater while she was suffering so acutely from the shock of those dread tidings.

Why did she accuse herself with killing—*Whom?* Although she had mentioned neither name or relationship, there could be only one interpretation: Darius Gordon.

And then she had charged her husband with the crime, had demanded his arrest, had betrayed such wildly fierce rancor against him!

All this, and much more came back in those few minutes to trouble the Doctor Detective, now that his latest theory had been fully exploded, leaving him at a loss how to explain that bloody deed.

How much longer Harlow Dangerfield would have stood thus with such ugly pondering for company, is by no means certain; but presently his keen sense of hearing was attracted by the sound of shuffling footsteps beyond that door, and as he cast off his weight of gloomy fears and doubts, there came a low, timid tapping at the closed door.

Something in those sounds told Doctor Danger who it most likely was, and knowing how difficult it was to make old Roger hear, at times, he quickly advanced and turning the key, partly opened the door before saying aught.

That belief was a correct one, for the bowed figure of the aged servant was revealed, and catching the edge of the door with an unsteady hand, Quayle slipped through the opening, huskily saying as he did so:

"Let me in, sir! Don't keep me out! I *must* talk—I *can't* hold in any longer, sir!"

He cast a scared, nervous look over his shoulder as he came inside the room, as though he more than half-expected one or other of the policemen left on guard over the place to dog his steps.

Warned by that look of such a possibility, Doctor Dangerfield lost little time in closing the barrier, turning key in lock once more, then giving Roger Quayle a reassuring hand as he slowly but very distinctly spoke in his turn.

"There is nothing to be afraid of, Roger. No one can work you harm so long as I'm here to take your part."

Deaf as a post the old body-servant might be to the general run of people, but there

had always been three exceptions to that rule: his now dead master, Darius Gordon, that master's daughter, Marian, and Harlow Dangerfield.

Doctor Dangerfield spoke but little louder than his natural tone of voice, but Quayle seemed to catch his full meaning without difficulty.

And yet this firm assurance failed to nerve up the old man, for he shivered even more as he clung to this stalwart friend, and kept sending nervous, scared glances around them, principally toward the door from which they were now receding.

There was no certainty that either of the officers on duty there would even attempt to play spy or eavesdropper, but something warned the surgeon that Roger Quayle had words to utter which it were best his friendly ears alone should catch.

"I am afraid, sir! I *can't help* but be afraid when—I've fought *so* hard to forget it all! I've tried so hard to *make* myself believe it nothing more than a dream! Yet—I *can't* do it—I *can't* forget!"

The gloom which twilight had sent into that closed room, concealed the unusual pallor which came to the strong face of the surgeon as he listened to these husky, feeble, yet passionate words. Was that awful riddle about to be solved at last?

The temptation to check the old man before he could utter words which might forever damn one who—before he could put into actual shape the fears which were now assailing the surgeon's brain—was powerful indeed, but Doctor Danger did not quite yield to it.

Although Roger Quayle had kept his lips closely locked as yet, it was easy enough to see that his endurance had nearly reached its limit. If repulsed here, would he not be forced to tell his tale to less friendly ears?

Doctor Dangerfield led his trembling charge over to a seat, and taking another one close before him, warmly chafed those cold, wrinkled hands with his warm palms, whispering words which, even if not heard, were still of service in soothing and calming the poor old fellow.

It was the kindly sympathy of an old friend he really needed most, and that the surgeon was now affording him.

Still, this had one drawback. It led the faithful old servant of the Gordon family to huskily lament the evil trickery which had broken off the match which should have come to full fruition.

Dangerfield shivered a bit in his turn at this talk, but with his face hidden there in the deepening gloom, he bore the tortures heroically, still hoping against hope that, after all, Roger Quayle might have nothing positively incriminating to say.

Still, it was the part of wisdom to get the worst over as quickly as possible, since there was no saying just when or how an interruption might come, and for this reason Doctor Danger recalled the old servant to his original mood.

"You came here to tell me something of more importance than reviving these old and useless memories, Roger," he said, with that peculiar intonation which long acquaintance had told him was the surest to reach those dulled ears. "What was it, then?"

Calmed in a measure, the old servant spoke with more firmness than the surgeon had dared look for.

"I couldn't wait longer, doctor, but I just *had* to come and tell—shield *her* from further harm, sir! Don't let them—Guard and protect Marian from all, I beg of you, sir!"

Again that darkness proved itself a friendly mask, but Doctor Dangerfield spoke in cold, even tones:

"I have been working night and day to clear her husband from this awful crime, Roger, and that work is being done far more for *her* sake than through love or respect for Martin Bridgewater. What more can I do than this, old friend?"

Roger Quayle gave a start at mention of that name, but answered in clearer, plainer words:

"Martin Bridgewater never killed poor master, doctor, but—I *wish* I could prove that *he* did kill Mr. Gordon!"

"What! You are crazy, man!"

Doctor Dangerfield was taken completely

off his guard by these words, for instinct had all along been telling him that Gordon's son-in-law and no other had surely fired that fatal shot, in spite of his working so stubbornly to fix the crime elsewhere.

Yet it was not this positive assertion of Bridgewater's innocence that so startled him. Why should Roger Quayle give vent to such an unchristian wish, unless—some one else was guilty whom he loved far more dearly than the reckless, dissipated son-in-law?

Giving place to this supposition, it could point at only one living being, and Doctor Danger rejected that thought in fierce scorn. And yet the damning thought would not down!

"What do you mean by using such words, Quayle?" he demanded, his voice sounding harsher as he strove to keep it well under control. "If Bridgewater is innocent—"

"I *know* he didn't kill master, but I'd give half my lease of life just to fasten all proof upon him!" still more doggedly uttered the old man, sticking to the same meaning, but slightly varying his terms.

"What makes you say that, Roger?"

"Because—and this is what I came to make you understand, sir! Because, if Martin Bridgewater is cleared of the killing, then those law devils will surely begin yelping and snarling and howling at Miss Marian—can't you see it, sir?"

The doctor turned cold as he listened, but knew that he must sift this matter to the bottom before letting another hand fasten upon Roger Quayle, he compelled himself to quiet, then spent a few minutes in calming the excited servant before permitting him to say more.

"Now, Roger, I'll listen to you. You are calm enough to talk straight, if you only want to do it!"

"Would I even hint at such a thing, sir, without 'twas true?"

"Lies—lies false as hell itself, you mean!" fairly exploded the surgeon, temporarily losing his own control. "Marian is pure and guiltless as the very angels, and *you* ought to be the last man on earth to cast even the ghost of a doubt *her* way, Roger Quayle!"

"I know all that, sir, and I'd stake my very life on her innocence; but, would everybody hold equal faith in the dear lady? Would those bloodhounds of the law believe her? Would they not hold her down to bare proof, just as they might pinch a poor, worthless wretch who had never a friend to stand up for him?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHO IS THE WOMAN?

TERRIBLY excited though he had become over what he deemed a cruel slur upon the pure honor of the woman he still loved so passionately, Doctor Dangerfield retained sufficient coolness to see that by giving way to those passions, he was merely prolonging the ordeal.

Roger Quayle had been too greatly shaken by the discovery of his dead master to be fairly himself, and he required a cool head and a steady hand to hold him in check, just now.

The doctor struck a match and lit the nearest jet on the gasolier, thinking that he might succeed better with light to enable him to read each change as it took place in that wrinkled visage.

Then, resuming his seat, and holding both voice and face under stern control, he spoke again:

"Try and collect your thoughts, old friend, and then tell me exactly what happened here that black night. First, you saw the figure of a man on the stairs, you said, didn't you?"

Roger nodded his head, then added:

"I said *that*, yes, doctor; but I *might* have said *more*, for I did see that man's face, and 'twas that of Martin Bridgewater!"

"If you are so certain now, why did you express doubt then?"

"Because I hadn't time to see what would be best to admit, or what I had ought to hold back," declared the old servant, with what would have been refreshing candor under less serious circumstances.

Doctor Dangerfield readily caught his thinly veiled meaning, but just now he con-

sidered that he ought to learn the whole truth, at least so far as those lips could measure it forth.

"Why hold back anything, Roger? In so grave a case as this, you and all others ought to lend justice every possible assistance."

"Not with *me*, sir," doggedly muttered the old man. "I lied to them *then*, and I'd lie to you, now, only I know that the whole truth must come out unless I can get some true friend—not of mine, but of *hers*!—to tell me just what I ought to say, and to hearten me up!"

"I'm old—old and weak and silly, doctor! And I've thought it all over—I've been brooding over it ever since, and never so much as taking a wink of sleep! How could I, when—"

Doctor Danger slipped a hand over those quivering lips, and quieted the old servant. This terrible strain was rapidly breaking the poor fellow down, and most gladly would Dangerfield have given him repose and relief, but—if not to him, Quayle would talk to another!

Indeed, the moment his lips were left free again, the body-servant admitted as much, his tones trembling as he uttered the words:

"Those devils in uniform have been watching me every minute since, sir! They'd never let me steal away, else I'd have found a place of hiding where they couldn't find and drag me back to tell all—or I'd have jumped into the river from the big bridge!"

"Not that—never think of suicide, old friend!"

"I'd do it, sir, sooner than be put upon the stand to bear witness against—against a woman!"

Barely audible came those last words, but the surgeon's ears caught them correctly, and once again that vague but awful terror assailed his very soul!

"What is it you mean by that, Roger?" he forced himself to demand, after a brief struggle with himself. "Go on. You said you saw Martin Dangerfield on the stairs: what else?"

"I saw him on the stairs, doctor, and I saw him again, maybe an hour later than that," slowly added the old man.

"You saw him? Where, and what was he doing?"

"I saw him leaving the house, sir, and seemingly in a great hurry, to judge by his movements."

"After the shot?" almost breathlessly asked the surgeon.

Roger shook his head slowly before answering.

"I heard nothing of any shot, sir, for—"

"But there surely was one, man alive!"

"I know," with a shudder as his eyes involuntarily turned toward that ugly stain in the carpet, now distinctly visible by the gaslight. "But I never heard it. You know I'm just a bit hard of hearing, sir."

Under different circumstances Doctor Dangerfield might well have rewarded that innocent admission with a broad smile, but it passed him by unnoticed, now. He had thoughts only for that terrible riddle!

"Go on. You say you saw Bridgewater leave the house, and that he was apparently in great haste. Oh, Roger!" with a sudden yielding of that artificial calmness once more. "If you had only thought far enough to have gone up-stairs—"

"I did just that, sir!" came the totally unexpected reply. "I went up-stairs to see if the master mightn't want something, and I saw—"

"His corpse!"

"I saw his own living self, sir!"

"What? Gordon—alive?"

"Alive and well as ever in all his life, sir!" declared Roger in husky, almost grieving tones.

And yet, servant never loved master better than old Roger had loved Mr. Gordon, as Dangerfield knew beyond all doubt. Then, this being so, why had he assumed such a tone?

It was all a bewildering puzzle, and seemed to grow darker, more intricate and involved the more he tried to penetrate its mysteries.

"You really mean that, Roger?" the doctor asked, trying to read the whole truth in that haggard, grief-marked visage. "Alive, and well?"

"Just that, sir," came the positive reply. "I knocked at the door, and master bade me open. I did so, and saw Mr. Gordon seated at his desk, with a paper of some sort in front of him."

"You saw him move? He answered you, then?"

"Both, sir. I asked him if there was anything more I could do for him that night, and he said no; for me to go to bed and not worry; that he would see to closing up the house himself."

Doctor Dangerfield caught at these final words, much as a man in deep water will grasp at even the frailest supports.

"That meant Gordon looked for some one to call, or to return, don't you see, Quayle? And—that somebody must have been Bridgewater!"

The doctor apparently had forgotten his busy efforts to turn black suspicion aside from that man, for now he was eagerly seeking a clue which might end in knotting a rope for Martin Bridgewater's neck!

But Roger Quayle was too deeply absorbed in his own disagreeable thoughts and fears to note that bit of inconsistency, and gloomily shaking his white-crowned head, he muttered:

"If it only *had* been! If I could only see it that way! But—I just *can't* do it, when I know—"

Wrought up to utter desperation by these repeated hints and broken assertions, the surgeon now gripped the old man by an arm, giving him a half-vicious shake as he sternly demanded:

"What is it you know, old man? Spit it out, all in a lump, or I'll—what are you trying to keep back, Roger?" abruptly changing both tone and manner as the servant flinched in his fierce grip.

"Nothing—I'm trying to tell you, sir," quavered the old man, piteously agitated.

"And—this is the way of it, sir!"

Taking a few seconds to collect his strength, Roger Quayle added:

"I left the master, as he bade me, but I didn't go to bed right off. Somehow I felt terribly uneasy, and so, later on, when I fancied I heard a sound out in the big hall, I opened my door and looked forth."

"What did you see?"

"A woman, going up the stairs, sir! And almost before I thought, I called to Miss Marian—"

"What?"

"I called to Mrs. Bridgewater, sir," as though that was the doctor's meaning. "And as she turned around, I saw her face!"

"It wasn't Marian—you *know* it wasn't her!" almost passionately insisted the surgeon, but with face pale and ghastly as that of a corpse.

"I wish I could say that, sir," added the servant, "but I saw her face—I saw it plainly by the hall-lamp, sir—and it was the face of Marian Gordon—God help us all!"

The old man bowed his head and covered his face with his trembling hands. Beyond all doubt, he firmly believed he was speaking nothing more than the truth, although even yet Doctor Danger could not think but what there was a mistake out.

For a number of minutes he pressed old Roger with questions, trying to shake his belief, but all in vain. To others the old servant might swear to a lie, but now he was with a true and tried friend, and he could only reiterate the words: it was Marian Bridgewater whom he had last seen going up to the room where Darius Gordon was shot to death!

The sight of his master's daughter about to visit Gordon, quelled old Quayle's fears, and he went to bed, sleeping quietly until the customary hour for rising in the morning. Then—Fred Whitley, junior clerk in the down-town office, came, and the tragedy was discovered.

This was all Roger Quayle could tell, and after fully satisfying himself on that point, Doctor Danger earnestly warned the old servant to move circumspectly, and to keep his own counsel for the present.

"I know there is a mistake out somewhere, Roger, and I believe you was deceived by a real or fancied resemblance in some degree. I almost *know* Mrs. Bridgewater was not *here* that night. If she had been, wouldn't she have said something about it when I paid her that visit?"

So Doctor Dangerfield reasoned, but he satisfied neither his own mind nor that of Roger Quayle. Peace would visit neither of them until it was fully proven that that woman was not Darius Gordon's daughter.

Particularly warning Quayle against having any talk with the officers in charge, Doctor Danger promised to call again on the morrow, then left the house to hurry off in the direction of the Bridgewater home.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PERFECT ALIBI.

It was after just this fashion that Doctor Danger had fallen into what was fully intended to prove his death-trap, yet he gave not a passing thought to that fact, nor thought of taking any precautions against letting that coincidence reach still further.

He never once gave thought to himself or his own affairs, save as one or the other was intimately connected with the dark fortunes of Marian Bridgewater.

The words let fall by old Roger Quayle had seriously disturbed him, in spite of the fact that he knew not even the shadow of actual crime could cling to his loved one.

"Twas all a mistake of old and sleepy eyes!" the surgeon declared over and over again as he hurried along at a brisk pace, longing yet dreading to have the ordeal finished.

Even now Doctor Danger could not accuse the old man of willfully lying. He too nearly idolized his young mistress for that.

"No. He surely saw a woman there on the stairs—unless he was dreaming it all!"

Doctor Danger brightened up a bit at this thought, but it did not last long. Such a solution was out of the question. A woman had surely been seen upon those stairs, but—who could she have been?

Thus the busy round kept going: every attempt to solve the dread riddle only brought him back to that query: *who was the woman?*

Doctor Danger knew that Marian Bridgewater was wholly innocent, but the question which gave him deepest trouble just now, was, could Marian give positive proof of that guiltlessness?

"Old Quayle can't hold it back much longer, and when he tells others what he told me, how will it be?"

No need to answer that query, for it answered itself. Beyond the possibility of a doubt, Marian Bridgewater would be placed under arrest to answer for the crime of killing her own father!

Unless she could prove an *alibi*! But, could she? Even when entirely innocent, one cannot always make that fact plain to other eyes.

It was in vain that Doctor Danger sought to outline his future actions. He could decide on nothing until after seeing Marian, and winning from her own lips the best and surest method of warding off from her this latest, most dangerous blow.

After this fashion, then, the surgeon's brain ran riot all the time it took him to cover the distance lying between those two houses, and when he ascended the stone steps to ring the bell at Martin Bridgewater's house, his future actions were just as problematical as when he took such a hasty adieu from old Roger Quayle.

That summons was promptly answered, and being immediately recognized by the servant, Doctor Danger experienced no difficulty about gaining admittance.

In good sooth he had other vouchers than his own face, had such been necessary; for even as he gave his name to the servant, Doctor Danger caught sight of a young couple just stepping into the hall from out the parlor where himself and young Fitch had awaited the summons from Lorita Mason, when she went to her friend to break that awful tidings.

And now, hurrying forward to greet the caller, that trio were once more together.

A few moments later found them all seated in the parlor, with Lorita Mason describing to the doctor the condition of his patient; for so the maiden persisted in considering Mrs. Bridgewater, in spite of the fact that the regular family physician had been called in to take complete charge of the case.

The first few words assured Doctor Dan-

ger that Mrs. Bridgewater was getting along even better than he had dared to hope for, much less expect; and with his fears set at rest in that direction, he was able to settle for a fact what he had before merely suspected: that his favorite "Little Corporal" was not only over head and ears in love with his more than pretty cousin, but that Lorita fully reciprocated that sentiment.

Under more propitious circumstances no doubt the surgeon would have gladly welcomed this discovery, and taken not a little delight in fostering the match, in every way so suitable; but just now the sight of their happiness in each other only served to render him more gloomy, in keeping with his surroundings.

As Lorita finished the report which, as nurse, she felt in honor bound to make full and minute, the lulling of her pleasant voice served to rouse the surgeon from the half-reverie into which he had fallen, and after a shake to scatter those gloomy forebodings once for all, Doctor Danger asked:

"Mrs. Bridgewater: can I see her personally for a few minutes?"

Lorita shook her fair head negatively, yet with genuine regret marking both face and tones as she made reply:

"I only wish you might, doctor, but poor Marian has retired, and has fallen asleep."

"What? So early as this?" ejaculated the surgeon, in surprise, all the greater from his past knowledge of the woman.

"Yes. I almost forced her to undress as if for the night, but of course I couldn't know—how *could* I sir?"

"Mrs. Bridgewater was suffering with a bad head-ache, doctor," said Emory Fitch, thinking it time to make the explanation a bit more clear.

"Yes—suffering awfully, doctor! Just as she did on that terrible night when—when *that*—happened, you know!"

"That night? *What* night?" hastily demanded the surgeon, his gloomy eyes beginning to flash and sparkle with even more than their natural brilliancy at the bare thought.

Could fate be so kind? Was he about to uncover the *alibi* he had been so earnestly praying for, ever since those apparently damning words let fall by old Roger Quayle?

"The night Mr. Gordon was killed. Lorita means," once more assisted the thoughtful lover. "*She* was here, and when Mrs. Bridgewater grew so much worse, Lorita sent word to her mother, my aunt, that she would not be home as early as expected."

"And I really did not get home at all," declared the maiden, with a smile doing battle with the tears that tragedy had sent to her pretty eyes.

Doctor Danger heard both speakers, but if asked to repeat the words their lips let drop, he could not have done so with his own life as the forfeit. All he knew was that here lay the all-important *alibi* Marian Bridgewater would surely need in order to protect her fair fame in case less friendly ears should ever glean what poor old Roger Quayle held as such a mighty burden.

Strong man though he had often proved himself, Doctor Danger was almost lamentably weak just now, for he dared not trust his tongue to speak, and sat there like one in a stupor.

But when he saw the lovers interchanging shy, wondering glances, the surgeon rallied his mental powers, and with studied calmness he spoke:

"You are wondering what has come over me, my friends, but I'll try to make that clear in good time. For just now—you are perfectly sure that was the night?"

"You mean—what is it you *do* mean, doctor?" asked Fitch, puzzled in his turn.

"Just this," his wits growing clearer and more steady under that stern effort. "Mrs. Bridgewater was too ill to have paid a visit to *any one* on the night her father was killed?"

"She never left this house, sir!" impulsively cried Lorita. "And after the clock struck nine, she never left her chamber—or her bed, for that matter!"

Doctor Danger shivered from crown to sole as he heard these positive words. Not that he had even for a single instant admitted the possibility of that awful deed

having been committed by the hand of the only woman he ever had or ever could love; but with so perfect an *alibi* as this surely was, not even the lowest, most degraded of law-hounds would ever dare breathe a hint against *her* fair fame!

So great was the reaction that the surgeon bowed his face and hid it within his joined palms, remaining thus for a number of seconds, while the lovers viewed his powerful emotion with half-awed curiosity.

But this weakness did not last long, and once more Doctor Danger fell to asking questions, the answers to which gave him all the satisfaction he could possibly have wished for.

Mrs. Bridgewater had not left that house after dusk on the evening of the night which witnessed the death of Darius Gordon. She was in her bed before the clock struck nine, suffering untold agonies with sick headache.

Lorita Mason had spent that night in her friend's company, never once losing sight of her until, the pain having deadened along toward daybreak, the two women had fallen asleep in the same couch.

When he had gained all this information, Doctor Danger said:

"I beg of you to recall and impress upon your mind each and every hour's incidents of that evening and night, Miss Mason. Although I sincerely hope that such may never happen, still *it is possible* that you may be called upon to bear witness to that night, before the ending of this sad affair."

"What—what do you mean, sir?" faltered the half-frightened maiden at this earnest address.

"That other trials may be awaiting Mrs. Bridgewater," said Doctor Danger, rising to his feet as if to take his departure. "If so, 'tis the duty of all her friends to soften the blow as much as possible."

Receiving Lorita's promise to comply with his wishes, Doctor Danger took his departure, striding swiftly away from the house, muttering:

"Not Marian—then—who was the woman old Roger saw that night?"

CHAPTER XXX.

DOCTOR DANGER'S DIPLOMACY.

IT was very late that night before Harlow Dangerfield fell asleep, for, having gone to his room where both quiet and privacy was assured him, he took time for carefully reviewing the Gordon mystery so far as it had progressed with him.

Night failed to work any change in the resolution those reflections had wound up with, and as Doctor Danger sat at breakfast the next morning, he determined to lose very little more time in securing an interview with Septimus Gowdy, head of the St. Louis Metropolitan force.

"It's only telling him what he'd find out for himself, sooner or later," mused the Doctor Detective, with a faint smile at the idea. "He knows *something*, and clearly suspects *more*. If I got ahead of him in investigating that story told by poor Dobson, 'twas merely because he put little faith in the theory; but, still, he'll either look into it himself or else set another at work—possibly that bull-headed Brown!"

After this fashion ran the thoughts of the surgeon while his matutinal meal was being disposed of, and when that ending came, he lost no further time, but briskly strode away in the direction of the Central station, where he did not even have to ask if the chief was visible, for an officer in waiting at once motioned for him to follow, then led the way at once to Gowdy's private office.

"Found you, did he?" came the blunt salutation of the chief as the door opened and closed behind the surgeon. "I hoped my word would get there before you left the hotel."

Doctor Danger was just a bit taken aback by this greeting, and no doubt his face betrayed as much, for the official added, a bit more sharply than at first:

"My messenger found you, didn't he, Dangerfield?"

"Did you send one after me, sir?"

"I certainly did, and when you showed up so promptly I thought—well, since you *are* here, what matter?"

"You wanted me on business, of course,"

persisted the doctor. "May I ask what for?"

"You just said it, old friend; on business. Now—*your* particular business first, please, for mine can wait a bit longer."

This hardly suited Dangerfield, but he was growing better used to the various little peculiarities which marked that character, and so concluded that he would lose nothing by falling in with that desire.

"You haven't forgotten what Dobson said in relation to the Gordon affair, chief?" was his beginning.

"Well, it hardly struck me as forcibly as it did you, Dangerfield, but I haven't forgotten—no," came the dry reply.

"I know you thought poor Dobson was lying in order to clear himself, Gowdy, but in so thinking you did him a grave injustice."

"Do you mean to say that you still believe Gordon was killed by that shot from under the white-elm tree, Dangerfield?"

"I mean to say that just such a shot was fired," firmly replied Doctor Danger. "It was to settle that particular point that I went to the Gordon place as soon as I parted with you, yesterday afternoon."

"I rather fancied you'd take all that trouble, doctor."

"It was trouble well taken, Gowdy, since through it I can convince you that Dobson told nothing more than the plain facts substantiate," a little tartly retorted the surgeon, annoyed by that odd, half-mocking smile even more than the words uttered by those lips.

"And you hastened here to enlighten my ignorance? Good! My ears are wide open, as our red-skinned brethren hath it, Dangerfield."

Seemingly the chief felt inclined to banter, or to really anger, but Doctor Danger kept cool enough to realize that a quarrel with him would work no good, while it might still further complicate the case in which he had so unexpectedly become involved.

As the safest method of averting possible trouble, the Doctor Detective at once plunged into his story, beginning with his arrival at the Gordon residence, and detailing each discovery as made while putting the story told by Samuel Dobson to the proof.

"It is a fact that some shot *was* fired, and fired on that very evening, too!" he declared, with honest conviction.

"Yet that shot did not kill Darius Gordon?"

"It did not. That shot was perfectly harmless."

"Then how can you be so positive that it was *the* shot?"

By way of answering this pertinent question, Doctor Danger entered more into details, making a particular point of the location of the lead, and of the two red hairs which that lead had carried partly into the wood with it.

"I put myself into *his* place, Gowdy, and acted just as Dobson swore *he* did. And when I turned my head to look toward that elm tree, I saw just how a shot from that quarter could have sunk into the casing, and while passing have cut through Dobson's beard."

"Because one portion of a tale may possibly seem true, is that any safe warrant for accepting all the rest of it, though?"

"In this case, I honestly believe it is," firmly declared Doctor Danger. "I know Sam Dobson. I am free to admit that he was bad when I knew him best, and that he has not grown better since I lost sight of him. But—*this much* I will maintain against all odds: Dobson could never tell *me* such a complicated lie as this tale would be, if all false, and I just know it!"

Again that odd, quizzical smile showed itself, but though Doctor Danger flushed a bit warmly, he made no allusion to it. He was determined to take no chances, and if a quarrel must come, the chief must do the forcing.

"I envy you your delicious faith in human nature, Harlow," said the official, with a real or admirably feigned sigh. "And yet—I don't know! If I had that admirable weakness, how long could I hold down this seat? Why, man, dear, I'd be flooded out of office on a tide of salty tears from countless eyes—and every one crocodilian!"

"I'd rather have my faith than your dis-

belief, Gowdy," coldly retorted the surgeon, then quickly adding: "But, as I set out to say, chief, while proving Dobson correct—for those two red hairs surely did come from that heavy beard of his!—in his story, I at the same time proved it a simple impossibility for that shot to have killed Gordon."

"I could have told you so much, Dangerfield, even if you hadn't discovered that bullet in the outside of the house," quietly assented the head of police.

"You could, Gowdy?"

"Have you forgotten how you bade me talk with Policeman Norris over the discoveries you had made on the piazza roof, Harlow? When you hadn't fairly rallied from the drugging, I mean?"

"And you went to the place, then?"

"Certainly I did. I went over all your calculations in company with Norris, and so I was ready to weigh the chances suggested by your pet Dobson when he told his story. And as I recalled the relative position of tree, desk, gasolier, and bullet-marked picture, I knew that your man was either lying or had taken up a false theory as to the manner in which Gordon came by his death."

Doctor Danger listened to this rapid explanation with no little surprise, not quite unmixed with chagrin. Chief Gowdy had proven himself a far keener detective than his younger ally, at least.

"Because I've served longer at the trade than you have, old friend," lightly declared the official, reading that expression with ease. "But I've told all I found out, while you—are still holding something in reserve. What is it, Dangerfield?"

Again that face flushed warmly, only to fade to the pallor which had become almost natural to it since this black trouble came his way; but Doctor Danger had come there expressly to fully confide in this keen-eyed man, and he would not flinch now that Gowdy had proven his peculiar dangerousness as an adversary.

Better—far better bind him as a friend!

Acting upon this determination, Doctor Danger went on to speak of how Roger Quayle had sought him there in that chamber of death, and without reserve went on to give full details.

There was no room left for doubting the powerful interest which Chief Gowdy felt in that recital, for his face wore no disguise now, and Doctor Danger could almost read his inmost thoughts.

"I thought it best to tell you all this, sir," the surgeon added in grave, troubled tones. "If for nothing else, to win your aid in preventing any and all annoyance from coming upon that poor, afflicted lady!"

"Meaning Mrs. Bridgewater, of course. And—you are positive that the lady is wholly innocent of this murder, of course?"

"Of course I am positive!" hotly cried the surgeon, losing his control for the moment. "Of course I would be positive, even if I couldn't prove the impossibility of her being there at that house on that night of the killing!"

"And you really have that proof, Dangerfield?"

For surest answer, Doctor Danger went on to tell of his call at the Bridgewater residence, and of all that he gleaned from Lorita Mason when there.

Chief Gowdy made a few notes on a pocket tablet while this account was being given, but when Doctor Danger finished, he made no remark concerning that *alibi*, save to say:

"Of course it's just as well to make sure of each step as you take them in a case like this, doctor, but I hardly needed evidence, myself. Honestly, in spite of Roger Quayle, I fancy the criminal in this case will prove to be a man, not a woman!"

"Yes, but—what particular man?" slowly asked the surgeon.

There was a brief pause, then Chief Gowdy slowly, gravely spoke:

"The deeper I look into the case, the blacker it looks for Bridgewater."

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRYING TO COVER HIS TRACKS.

DOCTOR DANGERFIELD shook his head in negation, but Chief Gowdy was not to be so readily checked. He had made up his mind

to say just so much, and even the evident wishes of his old friend could not change that determination.

"I know how you feel about it, Dangerfield, but if you will only take an honest, unprejudiced look at the case, what else is it? Until you can prove jet-black is snow-white, then it remains just as I say—unless another killer is found, the death of Darius Gordon must be placed at the door of Martin Bridgewater!"

"But Roger Quayle said—"

"Different things at different times, my friend, and who can go bail that at a third interview he will not have a third tale to tell?"

"I firmly believe that he was telling the plain truth when I saw him last, so far as he knew it."

"Yet you yourself have proven that it could not possibly have been Mrs. Bridgewater whom he says he saw and spoke to on the stairs that night," pitilessly argued the chief.

The doctor was silenced. If he held out for the truth of Roger Quayle, he must in some degree cast suspicion on Marian and Lorita. If the girl was right, then the old servant surely must be wrong!

"I have an idea that old Quayle will come out with the whole truth in good time, but until then, or until it is plainly proven that Martin Bridgewater is innocent, I intend following the line I have marked out."

"As I said, the deeper I look into the case, the blacker it appears against him. Every one knows that Martin Bridgewater has been on distant terms with Gordon for many months past. They know, too, that he has been dreadfully pinched for ready money of late. And—his wife is sole heiress to Darius Gordon!"

Doctor Dangerfield looked sorely troubled at these pointed words, but even now his loyalty held good, and once again he forcibly expressed his opinion of his one-time rival's innocence.

"I know it, Dangerfield, and that's just what's the matter with you," bluntly commented the other, but with a kindly glow in his dark eyes the while. "You are entirely too generous; like a man so upright that he bends backward, and so shows a deformity to his neighbors!"

"Martin Bridgewater is bad to the very core. He was never an angel, as you'd ought to know from his dirty trickery played off on an absent rival; but the years which have passed by since then, have rendered him a thousand times worse."

"Bridgewater won his wife by the basest of lies, as no man should know better than you, Dangerfield, and—"

"Don't—even your hand can't touch that sore without—let it drop, if you are still friend of mine, Gowdy!"

Hoarsely spoke the surgeon, and his face betrayed something of the agony which he must have suffered in those bygone days; but Septimus Gowdy gravely shook his head, speaking firmly though with such evident sympathy and friendship.

"I can't help saying it, Dangerfield. You have kept yourself willfully blind for so long a time that nothing less will enable you to recognize the naked truth when it actually faces you. And so—let me have it out, once for all."

"I know, and so do you, that Bridgewater basely lied and cheated you out of your promised wife. Only for her sake, you would have followed and killed him; and I've always regretted that you didn't do it, too!"

"As you say, 'twas for her sake," huskily muttered the surgeon.

"The poor woman would have been far better off in the end, Harlow; but let that particular point pass for just now. I meant to add this: that within less than a year after having so treacherously won the hand of Marian Gordon—he never touched her heart, I'm confident—Martin Bridgewater began to show himself in his true colors, even to her."

"Every year since then matters have gone from bad to worse, so far as he is concerned. I could tell you enough to make your blood fairly boil over, but why should I?—just this, then!"

"Martin Bridgewater has not only neglected and abused his wife, but he has

repeatedly insulted her by his public attentions to worthless women."

"In addition to this, he has become notorious in town as a hard drinker, even discounting a common drunkard on occasion. He is known in police circles as a gambler, an associate of suspicious characters, and on several occasions has been placed under arrest for disorderly conduct that fell precious little short of rioting."

Doctor Danger listened to all this with downcast eyes, his face more than ordinarily pale, and an occasional shiver betraying how acutely he was feeling—for Marian, not for any living man!

"Still," he said, looking up as the chief of police paused, "even granting all this, Gowdy, I can't possibly make it come clear that Martin Bridgewater would or could turn assassin!"

"He may not be *that*, Dangerfield, but if he stands clear, who is to shoulder that killing?" gravely asked the official.

There was no answer ready. With all his persistent efforts to read that riddle aright, Doctor Dangerfield was more than at a loss to decide who murdered Darius Gordon.

Waiting long enough to make this impotence felt, Chief Gowdy added:

"You yourself showed almost beyond the possibility of a doubt, Dangerfield, that it could not be either a case of suicide or of accidental killing. If so, then only murder remains."

"We know that Martin Bridgewater was at the house that evening, and unless your Dobson fellow lied, was engaged in a quarrel of some description—over a woman, Dobson declared—with Gordon."

"Roger swears he saw and spoke to his master after Bridgewater left the place," hesitatingly said the surgeon.

"What was to hinder his returning, later on?" drily asked the chief, with a faint and fleeting smile, then adding: "I have had good men at work on the case, and this is part of what has been brought to light."

"Bridgewater did not leave town until after daylight, the morning following the killing. He is known to have reached the Union Depot in ample time to have procured a ticket, but in place of doing so, he boarded a Missouri Pacific train without one, paying fare on the cars."

"He paid his fare to St. Charles, but when the train reached that place, Bridgewater never even left his seat, much less the coach. When the conductor made his next round, Bridgewater paid his fare to Atchison, Kansas, but he finally left the train before reaching that town!"

"Understand me, old friend. Bridgewater was on the train when the accident happened to the conductor, and he was still on board when the second conductor took charge of the train; but he was *not* among the passengers who reached Atchison, the place to which he had finally paid his fare."

"Now, why take all this trouble? Why act so shiftily, unless he wanted to cover over his tracks, and thus lose himself to all who might feel an interest in all his movements?"

Doctor Danger had no answer ready for all this, yet he shook his head in stubborn rejection of the deduction he knew Chief Gowdy had and was now drawing.

Not for the sake of Martin Bridgewater was he determined to dispute that guilt to the very end, but for the woman whom the law called that man's wife!

"Well, time will prove which of us is more nearly right, old friend," the chief said, in heartier, franker speech. "You remember I told you I had sent a messenger up to K. C. to interview the injured conductor? It is the substance of his report that I am giving you now."

"And this is why you sent a messenger after me, this morning?" asked the surgeon, recalling the manner of his reception.

"Partly this, but mainly because of a another discovery made by one of my force," quietly answered Gowdy, at the same time drawing a large pocketbook from his breast and opening it. "There is no positive clue as to Bridgewater's present whereabouts, but—here is something you may feel an interest in, Dangerfield!"

The Doctor Detective gave a start and caught his breath sharply.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER CLUE.

For, as he uttered these words, Chief Gowdy produced an oblong of daintily printed paper, placing it on the corner of his desk nearest to where Doctor Dangerfield was sitting.

The first glimpse was sufficient to determine its character, but as the paper flattened out before his eyes, the doctor instantly recognized the bill: for there near one end was a clean-cut triangle, with a dimly visible edging of red.

It was a bank-note of one hundred dollars, new, crisp, clean save for that dim stain; and all these facts were proofs that the bill had formed part of the smuggler's treasure!

"Do you recognize it, doctor?" quietly asked Chief Gowdy, his dark eyes twinkling with mingled pride and amusement as they watched his old friend. "Could you identify that particular note, think?"

"Who had it?" demanded the doctor, looking up from the bill with a long-drawn breath. "Not Martin Bridgewater, I'll wager my head!"

"You are right as to that, Dangerfield," admitted the chief, quietly. "Bridgewater did not shove that note, yet—"

"Who did, then?" with growing eagerness. "I can make oath it was one of the notes in the package I gave Gordon to place in his safe for the night, but which was missing when morning came. *Who had it?* For I believe that right there lies the clue we've been seeking, Gowdy!"

"I don't," declared the other, with provoking deliberation. "I know something of the fellow who shoved that bill—or attempted to get it broke, rather—and I can hardly think *he* did the killing."

"What reasons have you for thinking that way, Gowdy?"

"Well, I'm not so positive they can rightly be called *reasons*, but for one thing, the fellow don't act as though he was under shadow of the gallows."

"If he had nerve enough to kill, would he lack it to bluff?"

"When the penalty of being caught bluffing is the rope—yes!"

"You have the fellow under arrest, then? Was more than the one bill found upon his person, Gowdy?"

"He's in safe keeping, doctor," declared the chief, ignoring the other question for the time being. "Of course the main credit belongs to you, Dangerfield, since you afforded us such a perfect clue to act upon."

"As I promised you I would, word was sent to all of our banks and larger establishments, requesting them to keep a watch for large bills marked after this manner. In addition to this, I gave the description to the entire force at roll-call, and it was one of my fellows who turned the trick."

"In just what manner, Gowdy?"

"Following an idea of mine, he dropped into one after another of the gambling rooms which are now running, and at last he struck oil. He saw a fellow who was playing 'em wide open, and after losing a tidy pile of chips which he had won along at the start, he flashed a big bill for another supply: this same note, you understand!" tapping the dagger-marked money with one forefinger.

"My man saw that it was a new bill, and of goodly figure, then he stepped up for a closer look, and catching sight of the three-cornered cut there; at once arrested his man and took the bill along."

"Who was the fellow, Gowdy?"

"He gave his name as Ralph Devine, but he may have a dozen other cognomens stowed away for use on occasion, so I fear you'll be none the wiser for hearing that particular combination of letters. Wouldn't you rather take a look at the man himself, though?"

"Can I?"

"You surely can, old man!" declared Chief Gowdy, rising from his chair and taking hat from desk-top. "This is why I sent a messenger to your hotel this morning, Dangerfield."

"Thanks!" likewise rising to his feet. "I hope you can extort the whole truth from his lips, for I know *he*, and not Martin Bridgewater, must have done that bloody deed!"

"I wish I could hold faith one-half as

firmly as you, man, dear!" the chief said, half in admiration, half in what came very near being anger. "By keeping on as you've begun, Harlow, you'll have Bridgewater fit for canonization before the month comes to an ending!"

Doctor Dangerfield made no answer to this. He was trying to shield Marian, and in order to do that successfully, he felt that he must hold Martin Bridgewater clear of that awful crime.

Leaving his private office, Chief Gowdy led the way to an even more secluded apartment, but one which afforded a strong contrast to that office in all other respects.

It is a fixture in nearly every police-station, whether acknowledged to the public or not; and when spoken of by the initiated, is generally termed "the sweat-box."

At a sign from the chief, the single policeman who had acted as guardian of that single prisoner, passed from the gloomy apartment, and the spring-lock clicked sharply after his vanishing form.

Doctor Dangerfield took in the scene at a single curious glance; there was precious little furniture to distract the eye!

A couple of heavy wooden chairs, an iron bench which might serve as a cot on a pinch, and which was screwed firmly to the iron-sheathed floor; this completed the furniture.

Upon that bench the prisoner was seated, irons on his wrists, and a stout chain leading from the wall behind his back to an iron belt which was fastened about his waist.

"Well, Mr. Devine, how do you like it as far as you've got?" Chief Gowdy lightly addressed the prisoner as he nodded for Doctor Danger to take one of the chairs, seating himself in its mate.

"None too well, sir."

"Still, there are worse situations, Devine."

"And this would be mighty sight worse, sir, if I didn't know 'twas all a mistake putting me in here," quickly asserted the fellow, who did not act or talk like he was under the shadow of the gallows.

Doctor Dangerfield, already more than prepared to believe him guilty of murdering Darius Gordon for the moiety of the smuggler's treasure, could not keep this thought from flashing across his brain with disagreeable distinctness.

"How do you figure all that out so easily, my man?" asked Gowdy.

"Because I know that I haven't done anything to deserve such harsh treatment, your honor," declared the prisoner, with admirable candor.

"You know what this place is called, I reckon, Devine?"

"Maybe I could guess, sir," with a faint smile. "The sweat-box, isn't it?"

"You've hit it off the first shot, Devine," closely watching the effect of his words. "It is where we bring men who have something important to confess, and where—who helped you crack that safe Tuesday night, Ralph Devine?"

The prisoner gave a start, but it might have been at that abrupt change of tone, rather than at the words themselves, for he quickly rallied to say in firm, even surprised tones:

"What safe, sir? I never cracked a safe in my life, either on my own hook, or in cahoots with other lads."

"Lies can't save you, man, but may add to your punishment."

"I'm dealing it straight as a string, chief," declared Devine, without flinching in the slightest degree. "I can take oath that I never so much as saw the outside of a safe on Tuesday last, much less the inside of one being or quite cracked."

Chief Gowdy produced that marked bank-note, and pointing out the triangular slit made by the dagger, spoke sternly:

"This bill was, among a certain number of others, placed in the safe of Darius Gordon for safe-keeping. This bill was stolen from that safe, or else it was taken from the dead body of Darius Gordon, after his being killed for the boodle. Now—take your choice, Ralph Devine!"

The gambler shrunk visibly, then faltered forth in husky tones:

"As Heaven hears me, sir, I never stole—I never killed—that money was paid me by—*by Martin Bridgewater!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A LITTLE MORE LIGHT.

CHIEF GOWDY flashed a look of grim triumph across to the surgeon, yet taking care that the prisoner should not intercept it.

The latter looked subdued and frightened, in all probability by the stern manner in which that alternative had been presented him. And yet, even Doctor Danger much as he would have preferred it, could not say that this man looked or acted like one guilty of such a serious crime.

"Be careful of your words, Devine," warned the chief of police, now that the fellow had said too much not to realize the stern necessity of saying more. "If you are guilty of—"

"But I am *not*, sir!" protested the gambler, face and tones alike betraying his growing uneasiness. "I never so much as dreamed that— Would I have flashed up the money so openly, so soon after, if I had done anything like that to win it, chief?"

"All men are fools at some stage of the game, Devine, and this may have been your off spell. Still, if you can— When did Bridgewater pay you the money?"

The answer did not come immediately, and Ralph Devine moved uneasily on his seat and glancing covertly from face to face.

"Better stick to the bald-headed truth, my lad," hinted the inquisitor. "Lies can't help you along any road, unless it is to the Pen or the gallows."

"If I tell all I know, sir, will it be counted in my favor?"

"I never give or take a compromise, sir," with increased coldness. "I ask questions to fit the case as I see it, and expect them to be answered truthfully. If they *are*—and a lie is pretty certain to be found out, sooner or later, Devine—so much the better for the one who makes a clean breast of it all. If not—well, if *you're* an idiot, my friend, your face don't say so!"

Ralph Devine shivered perceptibly as he listened to this cold, even speech. There was no open threat made, yet right well he knew the significant meaning which lay back of those smooth, even sentences.

This was his first experience in "the sweat-box," but he had heard much concerning that peculiar institution from other lips.

"All I want to know if you'd bear down on a poor devil for—well, asking money as pay for keeping a close mouth, chief."

"I can tell you better as to that, Devine, after hearing you talk a little further," quietly said the chief.

"Did Martin Bridgewater pay you that bill for keeping silence as to the killing of Darius Gordon?" suddenly asked Doctor Danger, his impatience to learn the very worst making him tire of this apparently useless beating about the bush.

Chief Gowdy said nothing, but his brows gathered in a slight frown, and noting that, the prisoner refused to answer the question thus put.

"I don't know you, sir, and so—must I answer him, chief?"

"In good time, yes. You say that Martin Bridgewater paid you this particular bill. Are you dead sure of that much?"

Ralph Devine gave a short, dry laugh, then declared:

"Why wouldn't I be, chief? Until I struck oil right there, I hadn't seen a hundred dollar bill for ten years past!"

"How many such bills did Bridgewater give you Tuesday night, Devine?" abruptly asked Gowdy.

"All you found on my person, sir," moodily answered the fellow, "I was just blowing in the first of my new wad, when your cop gave me the collar."

"Indeed! A pretty large payment, Devine. Of course you earned that amount fairly enough, but, just to make some other points a bit more distinct, what led Bridgewater to fork over so liberally?"

The prisoner hesitated again, but not for long. With a shrug of his shapely shoulders he said:

"Well, at the very worst, chief, you can't make anything worse than a case of blackmailing out of it, so—my pal and I held Martin Bridgewater in our power, and he paid for my silence."

"Blackmail, eh? On what account?"

"A former marriage, sir."

This fairly surpassed even Chief Gowdy's expectations, and stung Doctor Danger like a score of electric needles.

A hot flush leaped into his face, and with poorly hidden emotion he sternly cried out:

"Careful, sir! If you bring such an infamous charge as that, you've got to squarely prove its complete accuracy, or fare the worse!"

Ralph Devine shrunk visibly from the strongly excited surgeon, but even more from those fiercely flashing eyes than from the words spoken.

"It's the gospel truth I'm telling, sir, and—"

"Your proof, then! If a former marriage—when and where and to whom?"

Devine looked half-appealingly toward the officer, but as Gowdy offered him no refuge, the fellow muttered in turn:

"I'm not so mighty sure I could tell you all that, sir, even if I really wanted to. I only know what my pal swore, but if that wasn't gospel truth, what made Bridgewater knuckle down so terrible quick?"

"When you two fellows nailed him for hush-money, of course?" cut in Chief Gowdy.

Again that hesitation, only to end after the same fashion as before.

"Let me take my own way, sir, and maybe you'll get at the bottom facts all the sooner. May I?"

"Go on. If I think you are saying too much—or too little—I can clap on brakes."

"Well, your honor, I just came into this little snap through my pal, and for a couple of years back we've lived in rich clover, milking the high-roller at odd spells, just as our good or bad luck warranted."

"Then, a few weeks back, we concluded to hit the gent a good bit harder, and maybe take a run over the briny, for luck. And so—well, chief, you know such things will sometimes happen; pal and I had a falling out, and this is the upshot of it all!"

"Explain your meaning a little more fully, Devine."

"Well, sir, we couldn't agree as to just how we'd ought to work the trick. My pal wanted to kill the goose and so gather in the nestful of golden eggs at a single sweep, but I—well, a standing account is a mighty comforting thing to have, I take it!"

"Go on. You quarreled over the method, not over the deed?"

"Just that, sir! My pal wrote to old Gordon, and offered to sell him the secret: all this without letting me know of it in time to put the kibosh on, you understand?"

"And then you acted without consulting your pal, of course?"

"Why wouldn't I, then?" with a short, dry chuckle which could not entirely cover his real uneasiness. "How was I to know that my mate didn't mean to throw me over, just as my advice was rejected? And so—I came on here, looked Bridgewater up, told him I'd got to have big money in a hurry, and if he couldn't or wouldn't loan it to me, that I'd be obliged to solicit assistance from his father-in-law!"

"That hint fetched him, of course. He swore he was dead broke, just then, but then he reckoned he might be able to borrow the cash from old Gordon, if I would give him a bit of time to smooth the way over."

"This was Monday evening, chief. And I said that if he'd pass his word of honor, as from one gentleman to another, I'd give him twenty-four hours in which to turn the trick. He said it's a whack, and that ended the matter for just then."

"But I didn't altogether trust my fine gentleman, don't you see? And so I hung around his heels tolerably close during the interval, and that is the way I happened to know when Bridgewater meant to call on Gordon."

"Tuesday evening, you mean?" asked Chief Gowdy, gravely.

"Right, sir," with a slight nod in confirmation. "Tuesday night, not far from nine o'clock, I take it, although I didn't note the hour particularly. And then—well, sir, I was watching outside while my man went in to brace the old gentleman, and then—"

"You fired the shot that killed Darius Gordon!" sternly said Gowdy, as the gambler hesitated again.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXPLAINING THE SAFE ROBBERY.

DEVINE gave a start at this stern speech, but it was one of surprise, rather than of terror or of conscious guilt.

"Who told you I shot, sir? Have you caught him, then?"

"Have we caught whom?"

"The fellow I shot at to scare off, sir," hesitatingly explained the gambler. "I glimpsed him listening at the window while Bridgewater was in that room with old Gordon, and, fearing lest he catch onto enough of the secret to make trouble for us in the future, I thought best to scare him off, and at the same time give Bridgewater warning that all wasn't running smooth."

"Wasn't Gordon in range when you fired?"

"No, sir. From where I stood, close to the big tree, I couldn't have hit any one in that room without making an awful wild shot; and that—well, chief, I can place my lead pretty nearly where I want to, at longer range than that one!"

This was neither tone nor expression of a murderer, even through awkwardness, and combining it with the proof which had been discovered by the Doctor Detective in testing the story told by Samuel Dobson, it was only reasonable to believe that Ralph Devine was speaking the naked truth, at least in relation to that odd warning.

"Do you always carry a battery to signal your fellows with, Devine?"

"Not always, sir," with a brief chuckle at what he possibly took for an official jest. "I gave a whistle which I reckoned maybe Bridgewater would understand, then bu'st a cap, as the saying goes."

"Risky work, that last, Devine!"

"Not so very, chief. The fellow showed his whole head against the lighted blinds, and I couldn't have asked for a prettier target. So—I shot to scare, not to hurt, chief. And then—well, I nearly split my sides open watching that fellow get up and git!"

"Which way did he go?" asked Doctor Danger, with a glance at Chief Gowdy.

"Jumped off the west end of the porch-roof, sir. And then—well, I couldn't have caught the fellow if I'd worn six legs instead of two!"

Chief Gowdy nodded in answer to that challenging glance, then said:

"How do you know your shot did no harm, Devine?"

"Well, sir, it may possibly have grazed the spy, although I merely aimed for his big beard. But as for my lead killing or even scaring old Gordon, I know better, and I can prove it, too!"

"How so?"

"He opened the shutters of that window, and looked out, sweeping his eyes all around as if looking for the fellow who fired that shot, or the one who must have made some noise in crossing the roof."

"You saw this? On your oath, sir?" sternly cried Doctor Danger.

"I saw this, and so did at least one other pair of eyes, sir," quickly answered the gambler.

"What other do you mean, Devine?" asked Chief Gowdy.

"Martin Bridgewater, sir. He left in a hurry when I whistled and fired that warning shot, and I saw him stop short in the shadow at the end of the house, looking up at the window for as long as old Gordon kept it open and his head sticking out."

"That looks as though he was afraid of being seen, don't it? Why should he be, though?"

"I'll pass it, chief! I don't see any reason now, and I never even thought of it then, or I might have quizzed the gentleman."

"You had a chance to speak with him, then?" asked Gowdy, with a well counterfeited yawn back of his white hand.

"I made one, yes, sir," with a degree of grimness entering his tones. "I was precious nigh broke my own self, and I wanted the boodle I'd demanded as the price of my silence; see?"

"You got it, of course, since you said Martin Bridgewater paid you a sum on account," quietly observed Chief Gowdy, but

under that seeming carelessness lay a snare in case this fellow was trying to conceal even a portion of the truth as connected with the events of that memorable night.

"I did get it, sir, but not so mighty easily as you seem to think," promptly answered the gambler. "I waited until the old gentleman closed his blinds again, and until my man got under headway, then I joined him, and struck him for the rocks."

"He told me the jig was up: that the old man wouldn't come down at his asking, and that I might go hang for all he cared!"

"Yet he paid you, you persist in saying?"

"He just did, chief," with a short, grim laugh. "I never did like to take a bluff, and this time I just wouldn't, you know! And so I came back at the high-roller sharp as he thought to be with me."

"I told him that I was so terribly tight pinched that I simply had to have the money, and if I didn't get it of him, I'd go back to old Gordon and sell out to him."

"Yet you were merely bluffing, you admit, Devine?"

"Just that, chief. I felt pretty certain of the main facts, though, or why would Bridgewater bleed so freely and show so much uneasiness whenever we hinted at blowing the gaff? And, one time, he said that if the old gent would only hop the twig, he'd care mighty little what we might do or say."

"Did he follow up that hint as to Gordon's dying, Devine?"

"Not in my hearing, sir, nor do I think he did to my pal."

"All right. I merely asked for information. Proceed, please."

"Well, I had to talk mighty brash to Bridgewater as we moved back into town, for he wanted me to wait for a better chance at his father-in-law, but that I didn't dare do, you know."

"Why not?"

"Because of my pal, sir. I'd made the break, and now I'd got to call the turn or lose my last stake; see?"

"Go on, Devine."

"All right, chief, and to boil it down a bit, I brought the high-roller to terms in the end, and when we came in front of a big office building, he asked me to wait while he ran up to his room for the money."

"And you let him go—alone?"

"I did, but he knew what card would show next in case he tried to jump the game without cashing my checks," significantly explained the gambler. "And with old Gordon as a fall-back on, I reckoned there wasn't nearly as much risk in waiting outside as there might be in going up with the gent; see?"

"You mean more than you have said, Devine. What is it?"

"That I liked the moonlight better than the dark; especially when I would have to take it in company with a fellow I'd roughed so badly. I am pretty nigh a stranger in St. Louis, chief, and if I should be found in such a place, dead, who could point out just how I caught it?"

"And that's why I waited outside, gentlemen, trusting to see both my man and the color of his good money. And I was right in both guesses: Bridgewater came back and gave me the amount of cash I'd struck him for."

"How much, Devine?"

"Three thousand dollars, sir! I hit him for five, at the start, but came down when he swore he couldn't possibly pay that much down. That century was the first bill I took out of his pile, and—well, chief, you've got the rest to put with it!" added Devine, with a heavy sigh.

"A very prettily told tale, Devine, but—fairy like! Do you really mean to have us believe that you never helped Bridgewater crack that safe in the office?"

"I never knew that a safe was cracked until you told it, sir."

"Have you forgotten my warning against lying, Devine?"

"I'm dealing it straight as a string, chief," doggedly. "How could I know? I'm almost an entire stranger here in town, and when Bridgewater called that his rooms, what else was I to think? He wasn't gone more than fifteen minutes at the outside, and no man could crack a safe so quickly as all that comes to. Then, too, if I'd even

dreamed of there being anything crooked connected with the job, would I have flashed the money like that, so near the place it came from?"

Ralph Devine grinned as though he counted this a sound argument.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE WORK OF BULLET AND STEEL.

TAKING it all together, Ralph Devine was passing through that ordeal with considerably more of credit to himself than either Chief Gowdy or Doctor Danger had deemed possible before the inquisition was set in motion.

The fact that he attempted to pass one of those steel and blood-marked bank-notes had seemingly fastened at least a share of that double crime upon him; but if his account was to be believed—and to even the Doctor Detective the fellow seemed speaking the plain truth—he could be convicted of no worse crime than that of extorting blackmail.

But if Ralph Devine was to be believed, how did matters stand with Martin Bridgewater?

True, he had left the Gordon place before its wealthy owner was shot, but might he not have returned between the time of his paying hush-money to the human leech and his presence being noted at the Union Depot, the next morning?

Or, if that crime did not lie at the door of Martin Bridgewater, by whose hand had Darius Gordon come to his death?

These, in company with many other thoughts, were swiftly flitting through the too busy brain of Harlow Dangerfield during those minutes when the actual guilt of the reckless man about-town was being placed almost beyond questioning; and when a quick rap sounded at the closed door, it caused him to start sharply in his seat.

Chief Gowdy passed over to the door, opening it, to afford a glimpse of a uniformed policeman, who handed him a folded paper. The contents of this were swiftly mastered by those keen eyes, then the chief of police gave the officer some instructions in a tone of voice inaudible to Doctor Danger or the prisoner within the sweat-box.

A few moments later the guard appeared to resume his duty, and then Chief Gowdy, without even a parting word to the gambler, left the room in company with the Doctor Detective.

"You've learned something fresh: what is it, Gowdy?" asked Doctor Danger when they were safely away from that unlicensed prison-cell.

"Word that Bridgewater has returned to town," curtly answered the official, but without attempting to meet those now burning orbs.

"I *knew* he was not the guilty wretch you've been trying to make him appear!" declared the doctor, yet there was a false echo to his tones that told how difficult a matter this prolonged and obstinate defense of a hated and loathed enemy was becoming.

If Chief Gowdy noticed this, he let it pass by without comment, but at a brisk pace led the way to his own private office. Once in there, he turned to face Doctor Danger, that sheet of paper showing in his hand as he gravely spoke.

"I honor you for the good fight you're making, even while I think you are dead wrong as to Bridgewater. Still, it's likely that we will not be kept much longer in the dark as to which one of us has summed the fellow up the most correctly."

Doctor Danger turned a bit paler at this speech, and the hand which he extended for that paper was hardly as steady as customary.

"You're hiding something from me, Gowdy! Let me see—may I see what's on that paper?"

It was given to him, but the few hastily written words thereon gave him only an aggravating taste of information. It was directed to the chief of police, then said:

"M. B. here. Cut in a row. Badly hurt, but may pull through."

"Where is this from, Gowdy?" asked Doctor Danger, looking in vain for place or date, while the scrawled signature was all Greek to his eyes.

"From the Union Depot, Harlow," an-

swered the chief, now busied at his desk, placing sundry articles into his pockets. "Morrison sent me that, and I've ordered an ambulance prepared for service. Of course you will go with me?"

"The trouble would be to hold me back, Gowdy!" grimly uttered the surgeon, returning that brief missive. "You questioned the officer who brought you this; what had he to say about the affair?"

"Barely sufficient to show that Bridgewater had a row of some description, during which he was badly cut, and a woman was shot."

"A woman?" hoarsely repeated Doctor Danger.

"The same one old Quayle caught a glimpse of, I really reckon, Harlow," declared the chief, completing his preparatory arrangements and moving toward the door. "Of course that's merely a guess of mine, so far, since Bridgewater has been mixed up with a good many women during the past year or so."

"If it only *might* be her!"

"Whether it is or not, I reckon we're drawing mighty nigh the clearing up point, Dangerfield! Even if Bridgewater didn't kill Gordon, it's dollars to cents he can fully explain both that killing and the safe-robbery!"

No answer came from Doctor Danger, partly because they were just then leaving the private office, but mainly because his brain was far too busily buzzing for easy speech.

And when the chief motioned for him to step inside the ambulance as it drew up in front of the station, and as the horses broke into a swift trot, that mental commotion continued.

Very few words were spoken during that brisk drive, and none at all which touched upon the Gordon tragedy. And still in silence the two men sprung from the ambulance when their destination was reached, to be hastily directed to the place where the injured persons had been removed from the too-busy space where that affray had taken place.

Doctor Danger at once recognized Martin Bridgewater, although a number of years had passed by since their meeting before this one; but as the man was moaning and stirring restlessly under suffering, he said nothing, but at once fell to work over those wounds.

They were caused by a knife, dirk or a poniard, all in front, and were nearly half a dozen in all. The flow of blood had been great, but had been temporarily checked, and so far as he could tell from a superficial examination, Doctor Danger believed there was little risk of death from those injuries.

"How is it, doctor?" asked Chief Gowdy, returning to that spot from taking a look at the other principal in that bloody affray.

"Not so bad as it might be," was the grave response. "With both care and proper nursing I can see no reason why he should not get along all right. But—the other?"

"Needs your help I'm afraid, even worse than Bridgewater does," the chief made answer.

"The deuce!" huskily panted the wounded man, rousing up at that mention, but flinching visibly as he recognized the stern face of the chief gazing down upon him. "I couldn't help—curse her for a devil! Don't let her go, chief! *She did it!*"

"*She did what, Mr. Bridgewater?*"

"*She did it, I tell you!*" repeated the wounded man, viciously, seeming to win renewed life and strength through that very hatred. "*She murdered Darius Gordon!*"

Those two men interchanged swift looks, then Doctor Danger rose, to pass over to where that accused assassin was lying in a semi-stupor.

Surgeon though he was, Doctor Danger saw, not a patient in sore need of his skill just then, but a possible—how *could* that be possible, though?

Marian Bridgewater was a perfect brunette, while this woman had light hair, looking almost like faintly tinted flax as a streak of sunshine fell across her head!

Then, how could Roger Quayle have mistaken her for his young mistress, the night of Gordon's killing?

The woman stirred uneasily at the surgeon's touch, but she said nothing as his skillful fingers were working over her hurts: two shots from the revolver which Martin Bridgewater habitually carried.

But a little later on there came the fierce cry of accusation from the wounded man's lips, and giving an abrupt start, the woman panted:

"I never—a lie! 'Twas all an—accident. *The old man shot—himself!*"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WHO KILLED DARIUS GORDON?

THE woman, fully as much through excitement as because of her wounds, fell back in a half-stupor, half-swoon, after that passionate denial, the words of which gave Doctor Danger such a burning thrill.

Could it be possible that, after all, Darius Gordon had come to his death through an accidental shot? That all their fine-spun theories had been based upon false deductions, and all his killing worry had been for worse than naught?

Still, Doctor Danger was able to perform his duty, and after both patients had been cared for sufficiently to warrant their removal to the hospital, they were lifted into the conveyances—for, after those momentous words Chief Gowdy deemed it wisest to send in a call for a second ambulance—and neither knowing that the other was bound for the same place, Bridgewater and the woman were taken to the hospital.

Once here, their wounds were more thoroughly cared for, and while both man and woman were seriously injured, there was little to fear as to their ultimate recovery.

But this important fact was withheld from both Martin Bridgewater and Felicia Calvert, as the woman gave her name.

Chief Gowdy insisted upon that being done, until the whole truth concerning the killing of Darius Gordon was brought to light.

"It rests between the pair of them, I'm pretty confident," he declared, while arguing the others over to his point of view. "They are better able to talk and stand questioning now than they will be later on, when the fever begins to set in. So—give us full swing, gentlemen, for an hour or two, and I'll warrant we learn enough to pay for both trouble and risk."

After a critical examination which confirmed the opinion expressed by Doctor Danger, the house surgeon gave way, saying that he saw no positive risk to the female patient, provided he might keep watch, to shut off talk and questioning whenever he saw evil effects arising.

As this was the best bargain he could drive, Chief Gowdy accepted that arrangement, and lost little time in carrying out his plans.

Under his instructions, Doctor Danger made the woman believe her wounds were so serious that this in all probability might prove her death-bed. And then the chief came to the front.

He told Felicia Calvert, to make use of the name of her own choosing, that Martin Bridgewater swore she murdered Darius Gordon, and was constantly urging her immediate arrest for that bloody crime.

"He lies, curse him!" passionately panted the woman, fierce light leaping into her dark eyes which formed so strong a contrast to her flaxen-hued hair and fair complexion. "*Gordon killed himself!*"

But it was not wild, incoherent denunciations and assertions that the astute chief of police desired, and falling to work with that one and in view, he quickly soothed the woman's hot temper, and then set her to telling the story of that tragedy, so far as she had been connected with it.

To follow her, verbatim, would consume far too much space just here; for as her moods changed, at times Felicia Calvert would wander aside from the main path, straying far and wide before the chief could call her back to the more important events.

At the very outset of her story, Felicia Calvert gave full corroboration to the statement made by Ralph Devine as to his quarrel with his "pal."

As may be recalled, the shrewd knave had taken care not to drop so much as a hint at her sex; without actually lying, he had left

the impression that his pal was a man, like himself.

The woman likewise asserted that they had long preyed upon Martin Bridgewater through a former marriage, his legal wife being alive at the same time he contracted a similar tie with Miss Gordon, and, in fact, was alive to that very day!

Doctor Danger turned aside and hid his pallid face at this point, but Chief Gowdy moved so as to hide that shape, and the woman went on.

Describing the quarrel which had resulted in her parting from Ralph Devine, for good and all, Felicia Calvert told how, hoping to raise a large sum of money once for all, she had written to Darius Gordon and charged his son-in-law with bigamy. She swore that she could and would advance positive proof of that crime, provided Gordon would pay her a sum of money sufficient to make it worth the risk.

Giving an address to which an answer was to be sent, she bade him set a date for that interview, provided he would pay the sum demanded in case she proved all accusations. And when that answer came, Gordon agreed to her terms, provided she would meet Martin Bridgewater in his presence, and there prove him guilty of bigamy.

While the negotiations were in progress, Felicia Calvert had kept herself in disguise, and used extreme care as to her movements during the day; but she had learned many minor items of fact concerning the husband, wife and father, one or two of which came into play later on.

Darius Gordon appointed for that meeting of accused and accuser, the very evening of the day on which Doctor Danger reached town, and to that fact no doubt his strange reception was wholly due.

Felicia Calvert explained why she was delayed in keeping such an important appointment, but she would still have reached the building in time to confront Martin Bridgewater, only for the shot and warning whistle which caused him to hastily break away from a very disagreeable interview.

Felicia Calvert told of her reaching the Gordon residence, and of her entering the house without making any signal, according to the instructions given in Gordon's last letter.

She was startled by Roger Quayle calling to her as she was mounting the stairs, but knowing from Gordon's instructions who the old man must be, and that he was very deaf, she merely pretended to answer him, then hurried on to the second floor where she was to find Darius Gordon.

Here, also, the woman took time to explain her actions. Half expecting the old servant to follow her for further explanation, in spite of the fact that he had spoken to her as "Miss Marian," she waited a few moments before drawing on to the door through which, it being ajar, came a ray of gaslight.

Widening this aperture without noise, Felicia Calvert stood motionless on the threshold, gazing at the form of Darius Gordon seated in the office chair at his desk.

Before him lay a silver-plated revolver, and at one side showed a partially open drawer of the desk. And then, looking up, Gordon evidently made the same mistake by that dim light as Roger Quayle had before him, since he sharply uttered the name of his daughter, at the same time leaping to his feet and stepping toward that motionless figure.

"As he did this, he knocked the revolver off the lid of his desk, and as it fell into the partly open drawer, it exploded!" positively asserted the woman, while Chief Gowdy and Doctor Danger listened with breathless interest. "He gave a smothered cry, and as he staggered, the drawer was pushed shut. He rallied, almost rushing toward me, then fell like a log!"

Pausing a few seconds to rally her powers, the woman continued, telling how she feared being implicated in that death, owing to the recent letters which she had written Gordon. She told how she conquered her fears of that ghastly corpse long enough to secure those letters, which Gordon had been reading at the time of her entrance.

Then, recalling how she had twice been mistaken for Marian Bridgewater, she stole silently out of and away from the house,

without being seen by the old servant, who was then retiring, all unconscious of his beloved master's death.

After thinking how she could best prove an *alibi* in case mention should be made of the figure seen on the stairs, Felicia Calvert decided to bleach her hair and enamel her face, thus altering a pronounced brunette into a seeming blonde!

"And you still swear that Martin Bridgewater has another wife, married prior to his wedding with Miss Gordon?" asked Chief Gowdy, gravely.

"I do take oath to all that, sir," came the husky response.

"Who is she, and where can she be found, then?"

"Right here, sir, for I am Martin Bridgewater's lawful wife!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RIDDLE UNRIIDLED.

DESPITE the suffering which her wounds undoubtedly caused her, Felicia Calvert was plainly enjoying the importance this dramatic revelation was winning for her; but a shade of annoyance came into her face as this, her final bomb, exploded with so little effect.

As a plain matter of fact, that assertion had been discounted in advance by her own words, and had she given any different answer, there would have been more room for surprise.

Yet, under that seeming calm, Doctor Danger was terribly wrought up, and it was no easy matter for him to whisper a few coherent words into the ear of Chief Gowdy.

"Find out, for sure, Septimus! Date, place, witnesses if any! Don't leave room for any mistake, for—you know?"

Chief Gowdy fully realized all that his friend might have said had ice-water filled his veins in place of warm blood, and his dark eyes mutely promised to make good the pledge his firm, warm grip was even then giving.

Then, unable to bear more without betraying his intense interest in that matter, Doctor Danger turned away and left the official to complete his inquisition.

That did not last so very long, for Felicia Calvert, in her desire to fully clear her skirts of that supposed assassination, spoke without the slightest reserve so far as that keen inquisitor could tell, raking up the past and naming places, dates, proofs, all of which combined would surely be sufficient to determine her truth or falsity in laying claim to being the lawful wife of Martin Bridgewater.

Not until he was fully satisfied that no important point had been left unprovided for, did Chief Gowdy part from that cot-side, rejoining his anxious friend in waiting.

"She's made her case out perfectly, so far as I can see," declared Chief Gowdy, without waiting for questions to come from those lips. "Of course I've got to look still deeper into the case; but, unless she's past-mistress in the whole art of lying, she surely is that rascal's legal wife!"

Doctor Danger bowed his head, shivering a bit at this positive announcement. While it was little short of bliss to him to know that the woman he had loved so long and so faithfully through all, was free as air so far as that hated tie was concerned, his heart fairly bled for Marian Gordon when she should learn all: that she was not, never had been a legal wife!

Chief Gowdy was shrewd enough to realize all this, and he knew, too, that action was better than silent brooding; so he took it for granted that the surgeon would bear him company in his next visit, which was to be paid Martin Bridgewater.

"I'm fully as interested in what that precious scoundrel can have to say for himself, you know, but with her revelation to serve as a check, I reckon we'd ought to get pretty nearly the bald-headed truth out of the fellow."

This natural, off-hand manner of treating the situation proved a master-stroke, so far as Doctor Danger was concerned. Just then he could never have borne that sore point being touched upon, but this—without a word of objection he bore Chief Gowdy company.

They found the injured man not only able to receive them, but actually eager to

learn all they could tell him concerning Felicia Calvert.

"She lied!" he cried, huskily, when Chief Gowdy bluntly told of her marital claims upon him. "She is not my wife!"

"Then you never passed through such a ceremony?" asked the officer, rapidly naming date and places as confided to him by the woman.

While he was saying all this, Martin Bridgewater flushed and paled in alternation, but when the chief ended his answer was ready.

"There's just enough truth in all that to make up a perfect lie! I'm free to own that I played the fool, pretty much as she says, but—"

"And you married another, while that wife was living?" sternly cut in Doctor Danger, pale as a corpse, but with eyes flashing and sinewy hands clenching as though he could hardly keep away from that throat.

Bridgewater flinched from that face, then muttered, huskily:

"Don't let him—send him away, chief! I can't—I'm going to tell all, but—don't let him come so near!"

But Chief Gowdy was not obliged to interfere. Doctor Danger fully realized the urgent need of winning a complete confession from those lips, and already regretting his rash outburst, silently withdrew a short distance, where he could hear, yet be out of Bridgewater's sight.

Relieved on this score, the wounded man made little difficulty about telling all he could relating to that tragedy, even going so far as to declare that he had hastened back to town before completing the urgent business which had taken him away in such hot haste, simply in order to meet and brush aside all possible suspicion which might attach to his name or his fame, so far as the death of Darius Gordon was concerned.

He declared that, before his marriage to Marian Gordon, he had received what he deemed proof positive that the worthless woman whom he had wedded while under the influence of liquor, had died of yellow fever in her Louisiana home. He had gone there as soon as the plague abated, and found her grave, her attendants, and never once doubted her death until long after his union with Marian Gordon.

Then Felicia Calvert, as the adventuress saw fit to call herself, began a system of blackmail which kept him fairly stripped of ready money. And, after a time, a confederate joined her, Ralph Devine by name.

Then Bridgewater went on to narrate the events of that night which witnessed the death of his father-in-law, or so many of them as he was personally connected with.

Darius Gordon had sent him a written command to call on him at his house before nine o'clock, that evening, prepared to meet grave charges which had been brought against him. He answered, promising to be there, ready to disprove all such accusations, and it was his belief that Marian, his wife, had been complaining to her father, that led him into so brutally abusing Gordon's daughter only a short time before his departure to keep that appointment.

Unconscious of the fact that nearly every word he spoke was merely confirming what others had said, or substantiating the evidence which had been so laboriously picked up, bit by bit, since that tragedy, Martin Bridgewater continued his explanation.

He had learned, indirectly, that Felicia Calvert had been married prior to the ceremony into which she had beguiled him while drunken, and it was in hopes of positively proving that first husband still alive and presentable, that he had so hastily left town early on the morning after the death of Darius Gordon!

This was skipping important events which would have to be reverted to, but as Chief Gowdy saw how ghastly pale, how intensely interested the Doctor Detective was in this unlooked for phase, he let Bridgewater go on after his own liking.

He told how he had striven to break his trail, fearing lest his human leeches should follow him up, to extort more money, or to hinder him in his efforts to prove himself a free man, so far as those claims went.

That original husband, so his information ran, had lived in the country not far south of Leavenworth, and paying his fare to Atchi-

son, as though he was meaning to take the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe for the mining country, Bridgewater slipped off the train and at once hastened away in strict accordance with that partial information.

He found the homestead mentioned, and learned much concerning the man whom he firmly believed to be the legal husband of Felicia Calvert; but where that man might be, his relatives could not say for certain. He had left the army at the expiration of his term of enlistment, and the last they heard of him, he was in St. Louis!

All this time Bridgewater had not seen a daily paper, but now, going to the city, he learned of Gordon's supposed murder, and at once took the train for home, more than suspecting who had committed that assassination.

Then, at the Union Depot, he met and recognized Felicia Calvert.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DOCTOR DANGER'S REWARD.

THE fact of her being in disguise—for bleaching hair and altering her complexion fairly constituted that—so confirmed his belief in her guilt, that Martin Bridgewater at once seized the woman, charging her with murder.

She flashed forth a keen knife, and stabbed him repeatedly, betraying such ferocity that, fearing he was fatally wounded, he drew his revolver and shot her twice.

Having reached this point, Bridgewater turned back a bit in order to more clearly explain why he had connected Felicia Calvert with that mysterious killing.

Having broken with her pal, Ralph Devine, the woman had written to Gordon, charging Bridgewater with being a bigamist, and after a limited correspondence, the stock-broker had made an appointment with her, then ordered his son-in-law to be on hand with proofs of his innocence.

The precise nature of that crime was not even hinted at, and Bridgewater naturally fancied that Marian had been laying complaint, as she had so often threatened, at times vowing she would urge her father to make a new will in which all his wealth should be so disposed of that her husband could never touch a dollar of it!

After his parting with his wife, and before meeting Gordon as bidden, Ralph Devine again fastened upon him, swearing that money he must and would have, else he'd blow the gaff to the old gent!

"Where did you get the money with which you bought him off?" Chief Gowdy gravely asked at this juncture.

Martin Bridgewater flinched at this, but after a brief hesitation he evidently deemed it best to confess all, now he had begun.

"Out of Gordon's safe, down-town. I dropped in at his office that afternoon, late, but he was busy talking with—with one whom I didn't feel like meeting, just then," after a short, disagreeable gulp. "I stood at the door, but no one saw me. Gordon was holding a package in his hand, and another man was telling him what it contained, and asking him to put it in the office safe for the night.

"I went away without making my presence known, but—as Heaven hears me!—I never so much as dreamed of robbery—then!"

Bridgewater went on to relate how, after catching at the chance to break off the interview which he saw was sure to prove anything but agreeable, since he as yet had no positive proof that Felicia Calvert was another man's legal wife, he was joined by Ralph Devine, who swore he must have money that very evening, under penalty of swearing out a warrant against Bridgewater for bigamy!

"Then, too, I was flat broke, and I needed cash to prosecute my search for that missing husband," moodily continued the wounded culprit. "And then—I remembered what Dangerfield had said about that package; ten thousand dollars in bank notes, to say nothing of the diamonds!

"I knew the safe combination; it came my way through pure accident, more than a month ago—and so—meaning to repay the money and return the stones as soon as possible—I got the package!"

After this point had been passed, speaking seemed easier, and Bridgewater told how

much he gave Ralph Devine in order to insure his silence; and how, seeing that all those bills were of large denomination, he had borrowed a few dollars in small bills of a friend whom he met at the Union Depot. It was his object to avoid all unnecessary observation, as well as to cover up his trail from those human leeches, and should he offer a hundred dollar bill as payment for a few miles' ride, that very attention would most assuredly be fixed upon him.

Martin Bridgewater ceased speaking at this point, for his strength was failing under that prolonged strain.

Doctor Danger, who had fastened eagerly upon one little bit of information which his former rival had let drop, now drew Chief Gowdy apart a bit, to whisper:

"Ask him the name of the man whom he was seeking for. A discharged soldier, he said!"

"Ambrose Reser," declared Bridgewater, when that question was put to him in turn. "But when he enlisted in the cavalry, he gave the name of Samuel Dobson."

Chief Gowdy was fairly taken aback by this totally unexpected announcement, and he hardly knew whether to rejoice or to regret, until he saw how gloriously the face of Doctor Danger was lighted up from within.

"Thank God!" broke impulsively from the surgeon's lips, as his eyes uplifted and fingers tightly interlocked. "She's spared so much, at least!"

"Yes, but—she's this dirty cur's wife still, don't you see?"

It was not often that the grave, stern chief of police gave way to his personal sentiments after this fashion, but when he so thoroughly despised Martin Bridgewater, so entirely sympathized with Harlow Dangerfield, how could he help it?

"I just couldn't help it, and that's what's the matter!"

Before that day died, a visit had been paid to the cot of Samuel Dobson, and being questioned, the ex-cavalryman fully substantiated the information which had come to Martin Bridgewater.

He had met and married Felicia Calvert—then passing by her lawful name—more than two years prior to her illegal ceremony with the rich, reckless young blood; that marriage proved anything save heaven on earth, and it was mainly to shake her off forever that Ambrose Reser changed to Samuel Dobson, and enlisted for the regular term of five years.

Dobson—to stick to the name by which alone Doctor Danger had known him, laid bare his disagreeable past without reserve, giving names, dates, everything which could help prove that marriage and make it clear to all the world that Marian Gordon was a legally wedded wife!

"I'd sooner try to prove the contrary!" moodily muttered Chief Gowdy. "As his wife, where do you come in at, Harlow?"

"As her friend—and—brother!"

But fate took the enigma in hand, and decided that Martin Bridgewater had cumbered this earth long enough.

His wounds took an unfavorable turn, and in less than one week from the hour of his meeting Felicia Calvert on that memorable day, Martin Bridgewater drew his last breath.

Felicia Calvert recovered from her hurts, but was obliged to stand trial, in which she still had Ralph Devine for "a pal." As the result of that trial, both culprits went to "the Pen" at Jefferson City.

Of course Devine did not take all that "hush-money" with him, and, with only two of the original notes missing (spent by Martin Bridgewater), but with the amount made good by himself, Doctor Danger had the grim pleasure of presenting "Captain Alf's" wife and son with their share of the smuggler's treasure.

And how did it all end?

With Doctor Danger marrying Marian Gordon (she would not bear that other name when it could be avoided), as a matter of course!

So it ought to have been in the beginning, but since—had he not fairly earned her hand, if only by his stern honor in fighting to clear her first husband's name of such black stain?

With Emory Fitch making Lorita a still nearer relative than second cousin.

With Samuel Dobson recovering from his hurts, to fully reform. And how could he help doing that? Did not "Doctor Danger"—the only man living whom the reckless cavalryman had either honored, respected or loved—resign from the service, yet appoint "Private Dobson" his particular orderly? And wasn't Mrs. Dangerfield—

"But there! She's an angel, out and out! And if any man can be said to deserve an angel-wife here on earth, that man is my Doctor Danger! And I can just eternally lick the dirty dough-boy who da's to hint it isn't all gospel truth—so there!"

THE END.

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